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CHARLES LAMB.

From a portrait by Hazlitt.

CHARLES LAMB:

A Memoir.

BY

BARRY CORNWALL. (pseud.)
[(Bryan Waller Procter)]

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PREFACE.

In my seventy-seventh year, I have been invited to place on record my recollections of Charles Lamb.

I am, I believe, nearly the only man now surviving who knew much of the excellent "Elia." Assuredly I knew him more intimately than any other existing person, during the last seventeen or eighteen years of his life.

In this predicament, and because I am proud to associate my name with his, I shall endeavour to recall former times, and to bring my old friend before the eyes of a new generation.

I request the "courteous reader" to accept, for what they are worth, these desultory labours of a lover of letters; and I hope that the advocate

for modern times will try to admit into the circle of his sympathy my recollections of a fine Genius departed.

No harm—possibly some benefit—will accrue to any one who may consent to extend his acquaintance to one of the rarest and most delicate of the Humourists of England.

B. W. Procter.

May, 1866.

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CHARLES LAMB.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION—BIOGRAPHY, FEW EVENTS—ONE PREDOMINANT—HIS DEVOTION TO IT—TENDENCY TO LITERATURE—FIRST STUDIES — INFLUENCE OF ANTIQUE DWELLINGS — EARLY FRIENDS—HUMOUR—QUALITIES OF MIND—SYMPATHY FOR NEGLECTED OBJECTS—A NONCONFORMIST—PREDILECTIONS—CHARACTER—TASTE—STYLE.

THE biography of CHARLES LAMB lies within a narrow compass. It comprehends only few events. His birth and parentage, and domestic sorrows; his acquaintance with remarkable men; his thoughts and habits; and his migrations from one home to another; constitute the sum and substance of his almost uneventful history. It is a history with one event, predominant.

For this reason, and because I, in common with many others, hold a book needlessly large to be a great evil, it is my intention to confine the present memoir within moderate limits. My

aim is not to write the "Life and Times" of Charles Lamb. Indeed Lamb had no influence on his own times. He had little or nothing in common with his generation, which was almost a stranger to him. There was no reciprocity between them. His contemplations were retrospective. He was, when living, the centre of a small social circle; and I shall therefore deal incidentally with some of its members. In other respects, this memoir will contain only what I recollect and what I have learned from authentic sources, of my old friend.

The fact that distinguished Charles Lamb from other men was his entire devotion to one grand and tender purpose. There is, probably, a romance involved in every life. In his life it exceeded that of others. In gravity, in acuteness, in his noble battle with a great calamity, it was beyond the rest. Neither pleasure, nor toil ever distracted him from his holy purpose. Everything was made subservient to it. He had an insane sister, who, in a moment of uncontrollable madness, had unconsciously destroyed her own mother;

and to protect and save this sister—a gentle woman, who had watched like a mother over his own infancy—the whole length of his life was devoted. What he endured, through the space of nearly forty years, from the incessant fear and frequent recurrence of his sister's insanity, can now only be conjectured. In this constant and uncomplaining endurance, and in his steady adherence to a great principle of conduct, his life was heroic.

We read of men giving up all their days to a single object: to religion, to vengeance, to some overpowering selfish wish; of daring acts done to avert death or disgrace, or some oppressing misfortune. We read mythical tales of friendship; but we do not recollect any instance in which a great object has been so unremittingly carried out throughout a whole life, in defiance of a thousand difficulties, and of numberless temptations, straining the good resolution to its utmost, except in the case of our poor clerk of the India House.

This was, substantially, his life. His actions, thoughts, and sufferings were all concentred on this one important end. It was what he had to

do; it was in his reach; and he did it, therefore, manfully, religiously. He did not waste his mind on too many things; for whatever too much expands the mind weakens it; nor on vague or multitudinous thoughts and speculations, nor on dreams or things distant or unattainable. However interesting, they did not absorb him, body and soul, like the safety and welfare of his sister.

Subject to this primary unflinching purpose, the tendency of Lamb's mind pointed strongly towards literature. He did not seek literature, however; and he gained from it nothing except his fame. He worked laboriously at the India House from boyhood to manhood: for many years without repining; although he must have been conscious of an intellect qualified to shine in other ways than in entering up a trader's books. None of those coveted offices, which bring money and comfort in their train, ever reached Charles Lamb. He was never under that bounteous shower which Government leaders and persons of influence direct towards the heads of their adherents. No Dives ever selected him for his golden bounty.

No potent critic ever shouldered him up the hill of fame. In the absence of these old-fashioned helps, he was content that his own unassisted efforts should gain for him a certificate of capability to the world; and that the choice reputation which he thus earned should, with his own qualities, bring round him the unenvying love of a host of friends.

Lamb had always been a studious boy and a great reader; and after passing through Christ's Hospital and the South Sea House, and being for some years in the India House, this instinctive passion of his mind (for literature) broke out. In this he was without doubt, influenced by the example and counsel of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, his school-fellow and friend, for whom he entertained a high and most tender respect. The first books which he loved to read were volumes of poetry, and essays on serious and religious themes. The works of the old poets, the history of Quakers, the biography of Wesley, the controversial papers of Priestly, and other books on devout subjects, sank into his mind. From reading he speedily

rose to writing; from being a reader he became an author. His first writings were entirely serious. These were verses, or letters, wherein religious thoughts and secular criticisms took their places in turn; or they were grave dramas, which exhibit and lead to the contemplation of character; and which nourish those moods out of which humour ultimately arises.

So much has been already published, that it is needless to encumber this short narrative with any minute enumeration of the qualities which constitute his station in literature; but I shall, as a part of my task, venture to refer to some of those which distinguish him from other writers.

Lamb's very curious and peculiar humour showed itself early. It was perhaps born of the solitude in which his childhood passed away; perhaps cherished by the seeds of madness that were in him,—that were in his sister,—that were in the ancestry from which he sprung. Without doubt, it caught colour from the scenes in the midst of which he grew up. Born in the Temple; educated in Christ's Hospital; and passed onwards to the South Sea House; his

first visions were necessarily of antiquity. The grave old buildings tenanted by lawyers and their clerks, were replaced by "the old and awful cloisters" of the School of Edward; and these in turn gave way to the palace of the famous Bubble, now desolate, with its unpeopled Committee Rooms, its pictures of Governors of Queen Anne's time, "its dusty maps of Mexico, dim as dreams, and soundings of the Bay of Panama." These things, if they impressed his mind imperfectly at first, in time formed themselves into the shape of truths, and assumed significance and importance; as words and things, glanced over hastily in childhood, grow and ripen, and enrich the understanding in after days.

Lamb's earliest friends and confidants (with one exception) were singularly void of wit and the love of jesting. His sister was grave; his father gradually sinking into dotage; Coleridge was immersed in religious subtleties and poetic dreams; and Charles Lloyd, sad and logical and analytical, was the antithesis of all that is lively and humourous. But thoughts and images stole in from

other quarters; and Lamb's mind was essentially quick and productive. Nothing lay barren in it; and much of what was planted there, grew and spread and became beautiful. He himself has sown the seeds of humour in many English hearts. His own humour is essentially English. It is addressed to his own countrymen; to the men "whose limbs were made in England;" not to foreign intellects, nor perhaps to the universal mind. Humour, which is the humour of a man, (of the writer himself or of his creations,) must frequently remain, in its fragrant blossoming state, in the land of its birth. Like some of the most delicate wines and flowers, it will not bear travel.

Apart from his humour and other excellences, Charles Lamb combined qualities such as are seldom united in one person; which indeed seem not easily reconcileable with each other: namely much prudence, with much generosity; great tenderness of heart, with a firm will. To these was superadded that racy humour which has served to distinguish him from other men. There is no

other writer that I know of, in whom tenderness and good sense and humour are so intimately and happily blended ; no one whose view of men and things is so invariably generous and true, and independent. These qualities made their way slowly and fairly. They were not taken up as a matter of favour or fancy, and then abandoned. They struggled through many years of neglect, and some of contumely, before they took their stand triumphantly, and as things not to be ignored by any one.

Lamb pitied all objects which had been neglected or despised. Nevertheless the lens through which he viewed the objects of his pity,—beggars, and chimney-sweepers, and convicts,—was always clear : it served him even when their short-comings were to be contemplated. For he never paltered with truth. He had no weak sensibilities, few tears for imaginary griefs. But his heart opened wide to real distress. He never applauded the fault; but he pitied the offender. He had a word of compassion for the sheep-stealer, who was arrested and lost his ill-acquired sheep, "his first, last, and

only hope of a mutton pie;" and vented his feelings in that sonnet (rejected by the magazines) which he has called "The Gypsey's Malison." Although he was willing to acknowledge merit when it was successful, he preferred it, perhaps, when it was not clothed with prosperity.

By education and habit, he was an Unitarian. Indeed, he was a true Nonconformist in all things. He was not a dissenter by imitation, nor from any deep principle or obstinate heresy; nor was he made servile and obedient by formal logic alone. His reasoning always rose and streamed through the heart. He liked a friend for none of the ordinary reasons; because he was famous, or clever, or powerful, or popular. He at once took issue with the previous verdicts, and examined the matter in his own way. If a man was unfortunate he gave him money. If he was calumniated, he accorded him sympathy. He gave freely; not to merit but to want.

He pursued his own fancies; his own predilections. He did not neglect his own instinct (which is always true), and aim at things foreign

to his nature. He did not cling to any superior intellect, nor cherish any inferior humourist or wit.

Perhaps no one ever thought more independently. He had great enjoyment in the talk of able men, so that it did not savour of form or pretension. He liked the strenuous talk of Hazlitt, who never descended to fine words. He liked the unaffected quiet conversation of Manning; the vivacious excursive talk of Leigh Hunt. He heard with wondering admiration the monologues of Coleridge. Perhaps he liked the simplest talk the best; expressions of pity or sympathy, or affection for others; from young people, who thought and said little or nothing about themselves.

He had no craving for popularity, nor even for fame. I do not recollect any passage in his writings, nor any expression in his talk, which runs counter to my opinion. In this respect he seems to have differed from Milton (who desired fame, like "Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides"), and to have rather resembled Shakespeare, who was indifferent to fame or assured of it; but perhaps he resembled no one.

Lamb had not many personal antipathies, but he had a strong aversion to pretence and false repute. In particular, he resented the adulation of the epitaph-mongers who endeavoured to place Garrick, the actor, on a level with Shakespeare. Of that greatest of all poets he has said such things as I imagine Shakespeare himself would have liked to hear. He has also uttered brave words in behalf of Shakespeare's cotemporary dramatists; partly because they deserved them; partly because they were unjustly forgotten. The sentence of oblivion, passed by ignorant ages on the reputation of these fine authors, he has annulled, and forced the world to confess that preceding judges were incompetent to entertain the case.

I cannot imagine the mind of Charles Lamb, even in early boyhood, to have been weak or childish. In his first letters you see that he was a thinker. He is for a time made sombre by unhappy reflections. He is a reader of thoughtful books. The witticisms which he coined for sixpence each (for the Morning Chronicle) had, no doubt, less of metallic lustre than those which he after-

wards meditated; and which were highly estimated. *Effodiuntur opes.* His jests were never the mere overflowings of the animal spirits; but were exercises of the mind. He brought the wisdom of old times and old writers to bear upon the taste and intellect of his day. What was in a manner foreign to his age, he naturalized and cherished. And he did this with judgment and great delicacy. His books never unhinge or weaken the mind; but bring before it tender and beautiful thoughts, which charm and nourish it, as only good books can. No one was ever worse from reading Charles Lamb's writings; but many have become wiser and better. Sometimes, as he hints, "he affected that dangerous figure, irony;" and he would sometimes interrupt grave discussion, when he thought it too grave, with some light jest, which nevertheless was "not quite irrelevant." Long talkers, as he confesses, "hated him;" and assuredly he hated long talkers.

In his countenance you might sometimes read—what may be occasionally read on almost all foreheads—the letters and lines of old, unforgotten

calamity. Yet there was at the bottom of his nature a buoyant self-sustaining strength: for although he encountered frequent seasons of mental distress, his heart recovered itself in the interval, and rose and sounded, like music played to a happy tune. Upon fit occasion, his lips could shut in a firm fashion; but the gentle smile that played about his face showed that he was always ready to relent. His quick eye never had any sullenness: his mouth, tender and tremulous, showed that there would be nothing cruel or inflexible in his nature.

On referring to his letters, it must be confessed that in literature Lamb's taste, like that of all others, was at first imperfect. For taste is a portion of our judgment, and must depend a good deal on our experience, and on our opportunities of comparing the claims of different pretenders. Lamb's affections swayed him at all times. He sympathized deeply with Cowper and his melancholy history; and at first estimated his verse perhaps beyond its strict value. He was intimate with Southey, and anticipated that he

would rival Milton. Then his taste was at all times peculiar. He seldom worshipped the Idol which the multitude had set up. I was never able to prevail on him to admit that "Paradise Lost" was greater than "Paradise Regained;" I believe, indeed, he liked the last the best. He would not discuss the Poetry of Lord Byron or Shelley, with a view of being convinced of their beauties. Apart from a few points like these, his opinions must be allowed to be sound; almost always; if not as to the style of the author, then as to the quality of his book or passage which he chose to select. And his own style was always good, from the beginning, in verse as well as in prose. His first sonnets are unaffected, well sustained, and well written.

I do not know much of the opinion of others; but to my thinking the style of Charles Lamb, in his "Elia," and in the letters written by him in the later (the last twenty) years of his life, is full of grace; not antiquated, but having a touch of antiquity. It is self-possessed, choice, delicate, penetrating, his words running into the innermost sense of

things. It is not, indeed, adapted to the meanest capacity, but is racy, and chaste, after his fashion. Perhaps it is sometimes scriptural: at all events it is always earnest and sincere. He was painfully in earnest, in his advocacy of Hazlitt and Hunt, and in his pleadings for Hogarth and the old dramatists. Even in his humour, his fictitious (as well as his real) personages have a character of reality about them which gives them their standard value. They all ring like true coin. In conversation he loved to discuss persons or books, and seldom ventured upon the stormy sea of politics; his intimates lying on the two opposite shores, Liberal and Tory. Yet, when occasion moved him, he did not refuse to express his liberal opinions. There was little or nothing cloudy or vague about him; he required that there should be known ground even in fiction. He rejected the poems of Shelley, (many of them so consummately beautiful,) because they were too exclusively ideal. Their efflorescence, he thought, was not natural. He preferred Southey's "Don Roderick" to his "Curse of Kehama;" of which

latter the poem he says "I don't feel that firm footing in it" that I do in "Roderick." My imagination goes sinking and floundering in the vast spaces of unopened systems and faiths. I am put out of the pale of my old sympathies."

Charles Lamb had much respect for some of the modern authors. In particular, he admired (to the full extent of his capacity for liking) Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and Burns. But with these exceptions his affections rested mainly on writers who had lived before him; on *some* of them; for there were "things in books' clothing," from which he turned away loathing. He was not a worshipper of the customs and manners of old times, so much as of the tangible objects that old times have bequeathed to us; the volumes tinged with decay, the buildings (the Temple, Christ's Hospital, &c.) coloured and enriched by the hand of age. Apart from these, he clung to the time present; for if he hated anything in the extreme degree, he hated change. He clung to life, although life had bestowed upon him no magnificent gifts; none, indeed, beyond books, and friends (a "ragged regiment"), and an

affectionate contented mind. He had, he confesses, "an intolerable disinclination to dying;" which beset him especially in the winter months. "I am not content to pass away like a weaver's shuttle. Any alteration in this earth of mine discomposes me. My household gods plant a terrible fixed foot, and are not rooted up without blood." He seems never to have looked into the Future. His eyes were on the present or (oftener) on the past. It was always thus from his boyhood. His first readings were principally Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Isaac Walton, &c. "I gather myself up" (he writes) "unto the old things." He has indeed extracted the beauty and innermost value of Antiquity, whenever he has pressed it into his service.

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE—CHRIST'S HOSPITAL—SOUTH SEA HOUSE AND INDIA HOUSE—CONDITION OF FAMILY—DEATH OF MOTHER—MARY IN ASYLUM—JOHN LAMB—CHARLES' MEANS OF LIVING—HIS HOME—DESPONDENCY—ALICE W. —BROTHER AND SISTER.

On the south side of Fleet Street, near to where it adjoins Temple Bar, lies the Inner Temple. It extends southward to the Thames, and contains long ranges of melancholy buildings, in which lawyers (those reputed birds of prey) and their followers congregate. It is a district very memorable. About seven hundred years ago, it was the abiding place of the Knights Templars; who erected there a church, which still uplifts its round tower, (its sole relic) for the wonder of modern times. Fifty years since, I remember, you entered the precinct through a lowering archway that opened into a gloomy passage; Inner Temple Lane. On the east side rose the church; and on

the west was a dark line of chambers, since pulled down and rebuilt, and now called Johnson's Buildings. At some distance westward was an open court, in which was a sun dial: and, in the midst, a solitary fountain, that sent its silvery voice into the air above; the murmur of which, descending, seemed to render the place more lonely. Midway, between the Inner Temple Lane and the Thames was, and I believe still is, a range of substantial chambers (overlooking the gardens and the busy river), called Crown Office Row. In one of these chambers, on the 18th day of February, 1775, Charles Lamb was born.

He was the son of John and Elizabeth Lamb; and he and his brother John and his sister Mary (both of whom were considerably older than himself) were the only children of their parents. John was twelve years, and Mary (properly Mary Anne) was ten years older than Charles. Their father held the post of clerk to Mr. Samuel Salt, a barrister, one of the benchers of the Inner Temple; a mild, amiable man, very indolent, very shy, and, as I imagine, not much known in what is called

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JOHN LAMB.

(FATHER OF CHARLES LAMB.)

(From a portrait in the possession of Mrs Moxon.)

"the profession." Lamb sprang, paternally, from a humble stock, which had its root in the county of Lincoln. At one time of his life his father appears to have dwelt at Stamford. In his imaginary ascent from plain Charles Lamb to Pope Innocent, one of the gradations is Lord Stamford. His mother's family came from Hertfordshire, where his grandmother was a housekeeper in the Plumer family, and where several of his cousins long resided. He did not attempt to trace his ancestry (of which he wisely made no secret) beyond two or three generations. In an agreeable sonnet, entitled "The Family Name," he speaks of his sire's sire, but no further; "We trace our stream no higher." Then he runs into some pleasant conjectures as to his possible progenitors, of whom he knew nothing.

"Perhaps some shepherd on Lincolnian plains,"

he says, first received the name; perhaps some martial lord, returned from "holy Salem;" and then he concludes with a resolve,

"No deed of mine shall shame thee, gentle Name,"

which he kept religiously throughout his life.

When Charles was between seven and eight years of age, he became a scholar in Christ's Hospital; a presentation having been given to his father, for the son's benefit. He entered that celebrated School on the 9th of October, 1782, and remained there until the 23rd November, 1789; being then between fourteen and fifteen years old. The records of his boyhood are very scanty. He was always a grave, inquisitive boy. Once, when walking with his sister through some churchyard, he enquired anxiously, "where do the naughty people lie?" the unqualified panegyrics which he encountered on the tombstones doubtless suggesting the enquiry. Mr. Samuel Le Grice (his schoolfellow) states that he was an amiable, gentle youth, very sensible, and keenly observing; that "his complexion was clear brown, his countenance mild, his eyes differing in colour, and that he had a slow and peculiar walk." He adds that he was never mentioned without the addition of his Christian name, Charles, implying a general feeling of kindness towards him. His delicate frame and difficulty of utterance, it is said, unfitted him for joining in any boisterous

sports. After he left Christ's Hospital, he returned home, where he had access to the large miscellaneous library of Mr. Salt. He and his sister were (to use his own words) "tumbled into a spacious closet of good old English reading, and browsed at will on that fair and wholesome pasturage." This, however, could not have lasted long, for it was the destiny of Charles Lamb to be compelled to labour almost from his boyhood. He was able to read Greek, and had acquired great facility in Latin composition, when he left the Hospital; but an unconquerable impediment in his speech deprived him of an "exhibition" in the school and, as a consequence, of the benefit of a College education.

The state of Christ's Hospital, at the time when Lamb was a scholar there, may be ascertained with tolerable correctness from his two essays, entitled "Recollections of Christ's Hospital" and "Christ's Hospital five and thirty years ago." These papers when read together show the different (favourable and unfavourable) points of this great establishment. They leave no doubt as to its extensive utility. Although, strictly speaking, it

was a charitable home for the sustenance and education of boys, slenderly provided, or unprovided, with the means of learning, they were neither lifted up beyond their own family nor depressed by mean habits, such as an ordinary charity school is supposed to generate. They floated onwards towards manhood in a wholesome middle region, between a too rare ether and the dense and abject atmosphere of pauperism. The Hospital boy (as Lamb says) never felt himself to be a charity boy. The antiquity and regality of the foundation to which he belonged, and the mode or style of his education, sublimated him beyond the heights of the labouring classes. From the "Christ's Hospital five and thirty years ago," it would appear that the comforts enjoyed by Lamb himself exceeded those of his schoolfellows; owing to his friends supplying him with extra delicacies. There is no doubt that great tyranny was then exercised by the older boys (the monitors) over the younger ones; that the scholars had anything but choice and ample rations; and that hunger ("the eldest, strongest of the passions")

was not a tyrant unknown throughout this large Institution.

Lamb remained at Christ's Hospital for seven years; but on the half-holidays (two in every week) he used to go to his parents' home, in the Temple, and when there would muse on the terrace or by the lonely fountain, or contemplate the dial, or pore over the books in Mr Salt's library; until those antiquely coloured thoughts rose up in his mind, which in after years he presented to the world.

Amongst the advantages which Charles derived from his stay at Christ's Hospital, was one which, although accidental, was destined to have great effect on his subsequent life. It happened that he reckoned, amongst his schoolfellows, one who afterwards achieved a very extensive reputation, namely Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This youth was his elder by two years; and his example influenced Lamb materially on many occasions, and ultimately led him into literature. Coleridge's projects, at the outset of life, were vacillating. In this respect Lamb was no follower of his school-

fellow: his own career being steady and unswerving, from his entrance into the India House until the day of his freedom from service; between thirty and forty years. His literary tastes, indeed, took independently almost the same tone as those of his friend; and their religious views (for Coleridge in his early years became an Unitarian) were the same. When Coleridge left Christ's Hospital he went to the University—to Jesus College, Cambridge; but came back occasionally to London, where the intimacy between him and Lamb was cemented. Their meetings at the smoky little public-house in the neighbourhood of Smithfield—the "Salutation and Cat;" consecrated by pipes and tobacco (Orinoco), by egg-hot and Welch rabbits, and metaphysics and poetry; are exultingly referred to in Lamb's letters. Lamb entertained for Coleridge's genius the greatest respect, until death dissolved their friendship. In his earliest verses (so dear to a young poet) he used to submit his thoughts to Coleridge's amendments or critical suggestions; and on one occasion was obliged to cry out "Spare my ewe

lambs, they are the reflected images of my own feelings."

It was at a very tender age that Charles Lamb entered the 'work-a-day' world. His elder brother, John, had at that time a clerkship in the South Sea House, and Charles passed a short time there under his brother's care or control, and must thus have gained some knowledge of figures. The precise nature of his occupation in this deserted place, however, (where some forms of business were kept up, "though the soul be long since fled," and where the directors met mainly "to declare a dead dividend,") is not stated in the charming paper of "The South Sea House." Charles remained in this office only until the 5th April, 1792, when he obtained an appointment (through the influence, I believe, of Mr. Salt) as clerk in the Accountant's Office of the East India Company. He was then seventeen years of age.

About three years after Charles became a clerk in the India House, his family appear to have moved from Crown Office Row, into poor lodgings at No. 7, Little Queen Street, Holborn. His

father at that time had a small pension from Mr. Salt, whose service he had left, being almost fatuous; his mother was ill and bedridden; and his sister Mary was tired out, by needlework all day, and by taking care of her mother throughout the night. "Of all the people in the world" (Charles says) "she was most thoroughly devoid of all selfishness." There was also, as a member of the family, an old aunt, who had a trifling annuity for her life, which she poured into the common fund. John Lamb (Charles's elder brother) lived elsewhere; having occasional intercourse only with his kindred. He continued however to visit them, whilst he preserved his "comfortable" clerkship in the South Sea House.

It was under this state of things that they all drifted down to the terrible year, 1796. It was a year dark with horror. There was an hereditary taint of insanity in the family, which caused even Charles himself to be placed, for a short time, in Hoxton Lunatic Asylum. "The six weeks that finished last year and began this (1796), your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a madhouse,

at Hoxton." These are his words when writing to Coleridge. Mary Lamb had previously been repeatedly attacked by the same dreadful disorder; and this now broke out afresh in a sudden burst of acute madness. She had been moody and ill, for some little time previously, and the illness came to a crisis on the 23rd of September, 1796. On that day, just before dinner, Mary seized a "case knife" which was lying on the table; pursued a little girl (her apprentice) round the room; hurled about the dinner forks; and, finally, in a fit of uncontrollable frenzy, stabbed her mother to the heart. Charles was at hand, only in time to snatch the knife out of her grasp, before further hurt could be done. He found his father wounded in the forehead by one of the forks, and his aunt lying insensible and apparently dying, on the floor of the room.

This happened on a Thursday; and on the following day an inquest was held on the mother's body, and a verdict of Mary's lunacy was immediately found by the jury. The Lambs had a few friends. Mr. Norris — the friend of Charles's father and of his own childhood—" was very kind

to us;" and Sam. Le Grice "then in town" (Charles writes) "was as a brother to me, and gave up every hour of his time in constant attendance on my father."

After the fatal deed, Mary Lamb was deeply afflicted. Her act was in the first instance totally unknown to her. Afterwards, when her consciousness returned and she was informed of it, she suffered great grief. And subsequently, when she became "calm and serene," and saw the misfortune in a clearer light, this was "far, very far from an indecent or forgetful serenity," as her brother says. She had no defiant air; no affectation, nor too extravagant a display of sorrow. She saw her act, as she saw all other things, by the light of her own clear and gentle good sense. She was sad; but the deed was past recall, and at the time of its commission had been utterly beyond either her control or knowledge.

After the inquest, Mary Lamb was placed in a lunatic asylum; where, after a short time, she recovered her serenity. A rapid recovery after violent madness is not an unusual mark of

the disease; it being in cases of quiet, inveterate insanity, that the return to sound mind (if it ever recur) is more gradual and slow. The recovery, however, was only temporary in her case. She was throughout her life subject to frequent recurrences of the same disease. At one time her brother Charles writes, "Poor Mary's disorder so frequently recurring has made us a sort of marked people." At another time he says, "I consider her as perpetually on the brink of madness." And so, indeed, she continued during the remainder of her life; and she lived to the age of eighty-two years.

Charles was now left alone in the world. His father was imbecile; his sister insane; and his brother afforded no substantial assistance or comfort. He was scarcely out of boyhood when he learned that the world has its dangerous places and barren deserts; and that he had to struggle for his living, without help. He found that he had to take upon himself all the cares of a parent or protector (to his sister) even before he had studied the duties of a man.

Sudden as death, came down the necessary knowledge: how to live, and how to live well. The terrible event that had fallen upon him and his, instead of casting him down, and paralyzing his powers, braced and strung his sinews into preternatural firmness. It is the character of a feeble mind to lie prostrate before the first adversary. In his case it lifted him out of that momentary despair which always follows a great calamity. It was like extreme cold to the system, which often overthrows the weak and timid, but gives additional strength and power of endurance to the brave and the strong. "My aunt was lying apparently dying," (writes Lamb) "my father with a wound on his poor forehead, and my mother a murdered corpse, in the next room. I felt that I had something else to do than to regret. *I had the whole weight of the family upon me;* for my brother—little disposed at any time to take care of old age and infirmity—has now, with his bad leg, exemption from such duties; and I am now left alone."

In about a month after his mother's death (3rd

October) Charles writes, "My poor, dear, dearest sister, the unhappy and unconscious instrument of the Almighty's judgment on our house, is restored to her senses; to a dreadful sense of what has passed; awful to her mind, but tempered with a religious resignation. She knows how to distinguish between a deed committed in a fit of frenzy and the terrible guilt of a mother's murder." In another place, he says "She bears her situation as one who has no right to complain." He himself visits her and upholds her, and rejoices in her continued reason. For her use, he borrows books ("for reading was her daily bread"), and gives up his time and all his thoughts to her comfort.

Thus, in their quiet grief, making no show, yet suffering more than could be shown by clamorous sobs or frantic words, the two—brother and sister—enter upon the bleak world together. "Her love," as Mr. Wordsworth states in the epitaph on Charles Lamb, "was as the love of mothers" towards her brother. It may be said that his love for her was the deep life-long love of the tenderest son. In one letter, he writes, "It was not a family

where I could take Mary with me; and I am afraid that there is something of dishonesty in any pleasures I take without her." Many years afterwards (in 1834, the very year in which he died,) he writes to Miss Fryer, "It is no new thing for me to be left with my sister. When she is not violent, *her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and sanity of the world.*" Surely there is great depth of pathos in these unaffected words; in the love that has outlasted all the troubles of life, and is thus tenderly expressed, almost at his last hour.

John Lamb, the elder brother of Charles, held a clerkship, with some considerable salary, in the South Sea House. I do not retain an agreeable impression of him. If not rude, he was sometimes, indeed generally, abrupt and unprepossessing in manner. He was assuredly deficient in that courtesy which usually springs from a mind at friendship with the world. Nevertheless, without much reasoning power (apparently) he had much cleverness of character; except when he had to purchase paintings, at which times his judgment was

often at fault. One of his sayings is mentioned in the (Elia) essay of "My Relations." He seems to have been, on one occasion, contemplating a group of Eton boys at play, when he observed "What a pity it is to think that these fine ingenuous lads will some day be changed into frivolous members of Parliament." Like some persons who, although case-hardened at home, overflow with sympathy towards distant objects, he cared less for the feelings of his neighbour close at hand than for the eel out of water or the oyster disturbed in its shell.

John Lamb was the favourite of his mother, as the deformed child is frequently the dearest. "She would always love my brother above Mary," Charles writes in 1796, "although he was not worth one tenth of the affection which Mary had a right to claim. Poor Mary! my mother never understood her right." In another place (after he had been unburthening his heart to Coleridge), he writes cautiously, "*Since* this has happened" [the death of his mother] "he has been very kind and brotherly; but I fear for his mind. He has taken his ease in the world, and is not fit

to struggle with difficulties. Thank God, I can unconnect myself with him, and shall manage my father's monies myself, if I take charge of Daddy, which poor John has not hinted a wish at any future time to share with me." Mary herself, when she was recovering, said that, "she knew she must go to Bethlehem for life; that one of her brothers would have it so; the other would not wish it, but would be obliged to go with the stream."

At this time, reckoning up their several means of living, Charles Lamb and his father had together an income of £170 or £180; out of which, he says "we can spare £50 or £60 at least for Mary whilst she stays in an asylum. If I and my father and an old maid-servant can't live and live comfortably on £130 or £120 a year, we ought to burn by slow fires. I almost would, so that Mary might not go into an hospital." She was then recovering her health; had become serene and cheerful; and Charles was passionately desirous that, after a short residence in the lunatic establishment wherein she then was, she should

return home: "But the surviving members of her family" (these are Sir Thomas Talfourd's words), "especially John, who enjoyed a fair income from the South Sea House, opposed her discharge." Charles however ultimately succeeded in his pious desire, upon entering into a solemn undertaking to take care of his sister thereafter. He provided a lodging for her at Hackney, and spent all his Sundays and holidays with her. I never heard of John Lamb having contributed anything, in money or otherwise, towards the support of his deranged sister, or to assist his young struggling brother. Soon after this time, Charles took his sister Mary to live with himself entirely. Whenever the approach of one of her fits of insanity was announced, by some irritability or change of manner, he would take her, under his arm, to Hoxton Asylum. It was very afflicting to encounter the young brother and his sister walking together (weeping together) on this painful errand; Mary herself, although sad, very conscious of the necessity for temporary separation from her only friend. They used to carry a strait jacket with them.

In the latter days of his father's life, Charles must have had an uncomfortable home. "I go home at night overwearied, quite faint, and then to cards with my father: who will not let me enjoy a meal in peace. After repeated games at cribbage" (he is writing to Coleridge), "I have got my father's leave to write; with difficulty got it: for when I expostulated about playing any more, he replied 'If you won't play with me, you might as well not come home at all.' The argument was unanswerable, and I set to afresh." Soon after this, the father, who at last had become entirely imbecile, died; and the pension which he had received from Mr. Salt, the old bencher, ceased. The aunt, who had been taken for a short time to the house of a rich relation, but had been sent back, also died in the following month. "My poor old aunt" (Charles writes), "who was the kindest creature to me when I was at school, and used to bring me good things; when I, school-boy like, used to be ashamed to see her come, and open her apron, and bring out her basin with some nice thing which she had saved for me—the good

old creature is now lying on her death-bed. She says, poor thing, she is glad she has come home to die with me. I was always her favourite." Thus Charles was left to his own poor resources (scarcely, if at all, exceeding £100 a year); and these remained very small for some considerable time. His writings were not calculated to attract immediate popularity, and the increase of his salary at the India House was slow. Even in 1809 (November), almost fifteen years later, the addition of Twenty pounds a year, which comes to him on the resignation of a clerk in the India House, is very important, and is the subject of a joyful remark by his sister Mary.

The impression made, in the first instance, on Charles Lamb, by the terrible death of his mother, cannot be explained in any condensed manner. His mind, short of insanity, seems to have been utterly upset. He had been fond of poetry to excess; almost all his leisure hours seemed to have been devoted to the books of poets and religious writers; to the composition of poetry; and to criticising various writers in verse. But afterwards,

in his distress, he requests Coleridge to "mention nothing of poetry. I have destroyed every vestige of past vanities of that kind. Never send me a book, I charge you. I am wedded" (he adds) "to the fortunes of my sister and my poor old father." At another time he writes "On the dreadful day I preserved a tranquillity, not of despair." Some persons coming into the "house of misery," and persuading him to take some food, he says "In an agony of emotion, I found my way mechanically into the adjoining room, and fell on my knees by the side of her coffin, asking forgiveness of Heaven, and sometimes of her, for forgetting her so soon." A few days later, he says to his friend, "You are the only correspondent, and, I might add, the only friend I have in the world. I go nowhere and see no acquaintance." At this time, he gave away all Coleridge's letters; burned all his own poetry; all the numerous poetical extracts he had made; and the little journal of "My foolish passion, which I had a long time kept." Subsequently, when he becomes better, he writes again to his friend, "Correspondence with you has roused me

a little from my lethargy, and made me conscious of my existence."

Charles was now entirely alone with his sister. She was the only object between him and God: and out of this misery and desolation sprang that wonderful love between brother and sister, which has no parallel in history. Neither would allow any stranger to partake of the close affection that seemed to be solely the other's right. Doubts have existed whether Charles Lamb ever gave up for the sake of Mary the one real attachment of his youth. It has been considered somewhat probable that Alice W. was an imaginary being; some Celia or Campaspe or Lindamira; that she was in effect one of those visions which float over us when we escape from childhood. But it may have been a real love, driven deeper into the heart, and torn out for another love, more holy and as pure: for he was capable of a grand sacrifice. No one will perhaps ever ascertain the truth precisely. It must remain undiscovered—magnified by the mist of uncertainty—like those Hesperian Gardens which inspired the verses of poets, but are still surrounded by

fable. For my own part, I am persuaded that the attachment was real. He says that his sister would often "lend an ear to his desponding love sick lay." After he himself had been in a lunatic asylum, he writes to Coleridge, that his "head ran upon him, in his madness, as much almost as on another person, *who was the more immediate cause of my frenzy*." Later in the year he burned the "little journal of his foolish passion;" and when writing to his friend on the subject of his love sonnets, he says "it is a passion of which I retain nothing." It is clear, I think, that it was love for a real person, however transient it may have been. But the fact, whether true or false, is inexpressibly unimportant. It could not add to his stature: it could not diminish it. His whole life is acted; and in it are numerous other things which substantially raise and honour him. The ashes (if ashes there were) are cold. His struggles and pains, and hopes and visions are over. All lie, diffused, intermingled in that vast Space which has No Name; like the winds and light of yesterday, which came and gave pleasure for a moment, and now have changed and left us, for ever.

In contrast with this apocryphal attachment, stands out his deep and unalterable love for his sister Mary. "God love her," he says; "may we two never love each other less." They never did. Their affection continued throughout life, without interruption; without a cloud, except such as rose from the fluctuations of her health. It is said that a woman rises or falls with the arm on which she leans. In this case, Mary Lamb at all times had a safe support; an arm that never shook nor wavered, but kept its elevation, faithful and firm throughout life.

It is difficult to explain fully the great love of Charles for his sister, except in his own words. Whenever her name occurs in the correspondence, the tone is always the same; always tender; without abatement, without change. "I am a fool" (he writes) "bereft of her co-operation. I am used to look up to her, in the least and biggest perplexities. To say all that I find her, would be more than I think anybody could possibly understand. She is older, wiser, and better than I am; and all my wretched imperfections I cover to

myself, by resolutely thinking on her goodness. She would share life and death with me." This (to anticipate) was written in 1805, when she was suffering from one of her attacks of illness. After she became better he became better also; and opened his heart to the pleasures and objects around him. It was open at all times to want and sickness and wretchedness; and generally to the friendly voices and homely realities that rose up and surrounded him in his daily walk through life.

During all his years he was encircled by groups of loving friends. There were no others habitually round him. It is reported of some person that he had not merit enough to create a foe. In Lamb's case, I suppose, he did not possess that peculiar merit: for he lived and died without an enemy.

CHAPTER III.

JEM WHITE—COLERIDGE—LAMB'S INSPIRATION—EARLY LETTERS—POEM PUBLISHED—CHARLES LLOYD—LIKING FOR BURNS, &c. — QUAKERISM — ROBERT SOUTHEY — SOUTHEY AND COLERIDGE—ANTIJACOBIN—ROSAMOND GRAY—GEORGE DYER—MANNING—MARY'S ILLNESSES—MIGRATIONS—HESTER SAVORY.

AFTER the pain arising from the deaths of his parents had somewhat subsided, and his sorrow, exhausting itself in the usual manner, had given way to calm, the story of Lamb becomes mainly an account of his intercourse with society. He was surrounded, during his somewhat monotonous career, by affectionate and admiring friends, who helped to bring out his rare qualities,—who stimulated his genius, and who are in fact interwoven with his own history. One of the earliest of these was his schoolfellow James (familiarly Jem) White. This youth, who at the beginning of this period was his most frequent companion, had great

cleverness and abundant animal spirits, under the influence of which he had produced a small volume, entitled "Original Letters of Sir John Falstaff and his Friends." These letters were ingenious imitations of the style and tone of thought of the celebrated Shakesperian knight and his familiars. Beyond this merit they are perhaps not sufficiently full of that enduring matter which is intended for posterity. Nevertheless they contain some good and a few excellent things. The letter of Davy (Justice Shallow's servant) giving an account to his master of the death of poor Abram Slender is very touching. Slender dies from mere love of sweet Ann Page; "Master Abram is dead; gone, your worship. A' sang his soul and body quite away. A' turned like the latter end of a lover's lute." White's book was published in 1796; and one of the early copies was sold at the Roxburgh sale for five guineas. Is it possible that the imitations could have been mistaken for originals? Afterwards, the little book could be picked up for eighteenpence; even for sixpence. It was always a great favourite with Lamb. He

reviewed it, after White's death, in the *Examiner*. Lamb's friendship and sympathy in taste with White induced him to attach greater value to this book than it was perhaps strictly entitled to; he even passes some commendation on the frontispiece; which is undoubtedly a very poor specimen of art. It is remarkable how Lamb, who was able to enter so completely into Hogarth's sterling humour, could ever have placed any value upon this counterfeit coin.

But Lamb had a great regard for Jem White. They had been boys together, schoolfellows in Christ's Hospital; and these very early friendships seldom undergo any severe critical tests. At all events, Lamb thought highly of White's book, which he used often to purchase and give away to his friends, in justification of his own taste and to extend the fame of the author. The copy which he gave me I have still. White, it seems, after leaving Christ's Hospital as a scholar, took some office there; but eventually left it and became an agent for newspapers. In one of the Elia essays "The praise of Chimney Sweepers," Lamb has

set forth some of the merits of his old friend. Undoubtedly Jem White must have been a thoroughly kind-hearted man, since he could give a dinner every year, on St. Bartholomew's day, to the little chimney-sweepers of London; waiting on them, and cheering them up with his jokes and lively talk; creating at least one happy day annually in each of their poor lives. At the date of the essay (May, 1822), he had died. In Lamb's words "James White is extinct; and with him the suppers have long ceased. He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died—of my world at least. His old clients look for him among the pens; and, missing him, reproach the altered feast of St. Bartholomew, and the glory of Smithfield departed for ever."

The great friend and mentor, however, of Charles Lamb's youth, was (as has frequently been asserted) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was a philosopher, and who was considered, almost universally, to be the greater genius of the two. It may be so; and there is little doubt that, in mere capacity; in the power of accumulating and disbursing ideas; and

in the extent and variety of his knowledge, he exceeded Lamb and also most of his other cotemporaries; but the mind of Lamb was quite as original, and more compact. The two friends were very dissimilar; the one wandering amongst lofty ill-defined objects; whilst the other "clung to the realities of life." It is fortunately not necessary to enter into any comparative estimate of these two remarkable persons. Each had his positive qualities and peculiarities, by which he was distinguishable from other men; and by these he may therefore be separately and more safely judged.

In his mature age (when I knew him) Coleridge had a full round face, a fine broad forehead, rather thick lips, and strange dreamy eyes; which were often lighted up by eagerness, but wanted concentration, and were adapted apparently for musing or speculation, rather than for precise, or rapid judgment. Yet he was very shrewd as well as eloquent; was (slightly) addicted to jesting; and would talk "at sight" upon any subject with extreme fluency and much knowledge. "His

white hair," in Lamb's words, "shrouded a capacious brain." Coleridge had browsed and expatiated over all the rich regions of literature; at home and abroad. In youth, his studies had, in the first instance, been mainly in theology, he having selected the "Church" for his profession. Although he was educated in the creed and rites of the Church of England, he became for a time an Unitarian preacher, and scattered his eloquent words over many human audiences. He was fond of questions of logic, and of explaining his systems and opinions by means of diagrams; but his projects were seldom consummated; and his talk (sometimes) and his prose writing (often) were tedious and diffuse. His "Christabel," from which he derived much of his fame, remained, after a lapse of more than thirty years, incomplete at his death. He gained much reputation from the "Ancient Mariner" (which is perhaps his best poem), but his translation of Schiller's "Wallenstein" is the only achievement that shows him capable of a great prolonged effort. Lamb used to boast that he supplied

one line to his friend in the fourth scene of that tragedy, where the description of the Pagan deities occurs. In speaking of Saturn, he is figured as "an old man melancholy." "That was *my* line," Lamb would say, exultingly. I forget how it was originally written, except that it had not the extra (or eleventh) syllable, which it now possesses.

There is some beautiful writing in this fourth scene, which may be read after Mr. Wordsworth's equally beautiful reference to the Olympian gods and goddesses, in the fourth book of the "Excursion," entitled "Despondency Corrected." The last explains more completely than the other the attributes of the deities specially named.

The most elaborate (perhaps impartial) sketches of Coleridge—his great talents, combined with his great weaknesses — may be found in Hazlitt's Essays, "The Spirit of the Age" and "My First Acquaintance with Poets;" and in the eighth chapter of Mr. Carlyle's "Life of John Sterling."

In Lamb's letters it is easy to perceive that the

writer soon became aware of the foibles of his friend. "Cultivate simplicity, Coleridge," is his admonition as early as 1796. In another place his remark is, "You have been straining your faculties to bring together things infinitely distant and unlike." Again "I grieve from my very soul to observe you in your plans of life veering about from this hope to the other and settling nowhere." Robert Southey, whose prose style was the perfection of neatness, and who was intimate with Coleridge throughout his life, laments that it is "extraordinary that he should write in so rambling and inconclusive a manner;" his mind, which was undoubtedly very pliable and subtle, "turning and winding, till you get weary of following his mazy movements."

Charles Lamb, however, always sincerely admired and loved his old schoolfellow, and grieved deeply when he died. The recollection of this event, which happened many years afterwards (in 1834), never left Lamb until his own death; he used perpetually to exclaim "Coleridge is dead, Coleridge is dead," in a low, musing, meditative voice. These

exclamations (addressed to no one) were, as Lamb was a most unaffected man, assuredly involuntary, and showed that he could not get rid of the melancholy truth. At this distance of time, many persons (judging by what he has left behind him), wonder at the extent of admiration which possessed some of Coleridge's cotemporaries: Charles Lamb accorded to his genius something scarcely short of absolute worship: Robert Southey considered his capacity as exceeding that of almost all other writers; and Leigh Hunt, speaking of Coleridge's personal appearance, says "he had a mighty intellect put upon a sensual body." Persons who were intimate with both have suggested that even Wordsworth was indebted to him for some of his philosophy. As late as 1818 Lamb, when dedicating his works to him, says that Coleridge "first kindled in him if not the power the love of poetry and beauty and kindness." He must be judged, however, by what he has actually *done*.

I am not here as the valuer of Coleridge's merits. I have no pretensions and no desire to assume so

delicate an office. His dreams and intentions were undoubtedly good, and, had he been able to carry them out for the benefit of the world, would have entitled himself to the name of a great poet, a great genius. His readiness to discuss *all* subjects, and his ability to talk on most of them with ease, were marvellous. But he was always infirm of purpose, and never did justice to his own capacity. Amongst other men of talent who have sung Coleridge's praises should be named Hazlitt, who knew him in 1798, and has enshrined him in the first of his charming papers, entitled "Winterslow Essays." Hazlitt admits his feebleness of purpose; but speaks of his genius, shining upon his own (then) dumb inarticulate nature, as the sun "upon the puddles of the road." Coleridge at that time was an Unitarian minister, and had come to preach, instead of the minister for the time being, at Shrewsbury. Hazlitt rose before daylight (it was in January) and walked from Wem to Shrewsbury, a distance of ten miles, to hear the "celebrated" man, who combined the inspirations of poet and preacher in one person,

enlighten a Shropshire congregation. "Never, the longest day I have to live" (says he,) "shall I have such another walk as this cold raw comfortless one, in the winter of 1798. When I got there [to the Chapel] the organ was playing the 100th Psalm, and when it was done, Mr. Coleridge rose and gave out his text,—'And he went up into the mountain to pray, HIMSELF ALONE.' The preacher then launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind," &c. Coleridge was at that time only five and twenty years of age; yet he seems even then to have been able to decide on many writers in logic and rhetoric, philosophy and poetry. Of course, he was familiar with the works of his friend Wordsworth; of whom he cleverly observed, in reply to the depreciating opinion of Mackintosh, "He strides on so far before you, that he dwindles in the distance."*

It would be very interesting, were it practicable, to trace with certainty the sources that supplied

* The most convincing evidence of Coleridge's powers is to be found in his Table Talk. It appears, from it that he was ready to discuss (almost) any subject; and that he was capable of talking ably upon most, and cleverly upon all.

Charles Lamb's inspiration. But this must always be impossible. For inspiration, in all cases, proceeds from many sources, although there may be one influence predominating. It is clear that a great Tragedy mainly determined his conduct through life, and operated therefore materially on his thoughts as well as actions. The terrible death of his mother concentrated and strengthened his mind, and prevented its dissipation into trifling and ignoble thoughts. The regularity of the India House labour upheld him. The extent and character of his acquaintance also helped to determine the quality of the things which he produced. Had he seen less, his mind might have become warped and rigid, as from want of space. Had he seen too much, his thoughts might have been split and exhausted upon too many points, — and would thus have been so perplexed and harassed, that the value of his productions now known and current through all classes might scarcely have exceeded a negative quantity. Then, in his companions he must be accounted fortunate. Coleridge helped to unloose

his mind from too precise notions: Southey gave it consistency and correctness: Manning expanded his vision: Hazlitt gave him daring: perhaps even poor George Dyer, like some unrecognized virtue, may have kept alive and nourished the pity and tenderness which were originally sown within him. We must leave the difficulty as we must leave the great problems of Nature, unexplained; and be content with what is self-evident before us. We know, at all events, that he had an open heart, and that the heart is a fountain which never fails.

The earliest productions of Lamb which have come down to us, namely verses, and criticism and letters, are all in a grave and thoughtful tone. The letters, at first, are on melancholy subjects, but afterwards stray into criticism or into details of his readings, or an account of his predilections for books and authors. At one or two and twenty he had read and formed opinions on Shakespeare, on Beaumont and Fletcher, on Massinger, Milton, Cowley, Izaac Walton, Burns, Collins and others; some of these, be it observed, lying much out of the ordinary course of a young

man's reading. He was also acquainted with the writings of Priestley and Wesley and Jonathan Edwards; for the first of whom he entertained the deepest respect.

Lamb's verses were always good, steady and firm, and void of those magniloquent commonplaces which so clearly betray the immature writer. They were at no time misty nor inconsequent; but contained proof that he had reasoned out his idea. From the age of twenty-one to the age of fifty-nine, when he died, he hated fine words and flourishes of rhetoric. His imagination (not very lofty perhaps) is to be discovered less in his verse than in his prose humour, than in his letters and essays. In these it was never trivial; but was always knit together by good sense, or softened by tenderness. Real humour seldom makes its appearance in the first literary ventures of young writers. Accordingly, symptoms of humour (which nevertheless were not long delayed) are not to be discovered in Charles Lamb's first letters or poems; the latter, when prepared for publication in 1796, being especially grave. They are entitled "Poems by

Charles Lamb of the India House," and are inscribed to "Mary Anne Lamb, the author's best friend and sister." After some procrastination, the book containing them was published in 1797, conjointly with other verses by Coleridge and Charles Lloyd. "We came into our first battle," (Charles says in his dedication to Coleridge, in 1818,) "under cover of the greater Ajax." In this volume, Lloyd's verses took precedence of Lamb's, at Coleridge's suggestion. This suggestion, the reason of which is not very obvious, was very readily acceded to; Lamb having a sincere regard for Lloyd, who (with a fine reasoning mind) was subject to that sad mental disease, which was common to both their families. Lamb has addressed some verses to Lloyd at this date, which indicate the great respect he felt towards his friend's intellect:

> "I'll think less meanly of myself,
> That Lloyd will sometimes think of me."

This joint volume was published without much success. In the same year Lamb and his sister paid a visit to Coleridge then living at Stowey, in

Somersetshire; after which Coleridge, for what purpose does not very clearly appear, migrated to Germany. This happened in the year 1798.

Charles Lloyd, one of the triumvirate of 1797, was the son of a banker at Birmingham. He was educated as a Quaker, but seceded from that body, and afterwards became "perplexed in mind," and very desponding. He often took up his residence in London, but did not mingle much with society. An extreme melancholy darkened his latter days; and, as I believe, he died insane. He published various poems, and translated, from the Italian into English blank verse, the tragedies of Alfieri. His poems are distinguished rather by a remarkable power of intellectual analysis than by the delicacy or fervour of the verse.

The last time I saw Charles Lloyd was in company with Hazlitt. We heard that he had taken lodgings at a working brazier's shop, in Fetter-lane, and we visited him there and found him in bed, much depressed, but very willing to discuss certain problems with Hazlitt, who carried on the greater part of the conversation. We

understood that he had selected these noisy apartments, in order that they might distract his mind from the fears and melancholy thoughts which at that time distressed him.

It was soon after the publication of the joint volume that Charles chronicles the different tastes of himself and his friend. "Burns," he says, "is the god of my idolatry, as Bowles of yours." Posterity has universally joined in the preference of Lamb. Burns, indeed, was always one of his greatest favourites. He admired and sometimes quoted a line or two from the last stanza of the "Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn," "The bridegroom may forget his bride," &c.; and I have more than once heard him repeat, in a fond tender voice, when the subject of poets or poetry came under discussion, the following beautiful lines from the Epistle to Simpson of Ochiltree.

> "The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,
> Till by himsel he learn'd to wander,
> Adown some trotting burn's meander
> An' no think't lang."

These he would press upon the attention of any

one present (chaunting them aloud), and would bring down the volume of Burns, and open it, in order that the page might be impressed on the hearer's memory. Sometimes—in a way scarcely discernible — he would kiss the volume; as he would also a book by Chapman or Sir Philip Sidney, or any other which he particularly valued. I have seen him read out a passage from the Holy Dying and the Urn Burial, and express in the same way his devotion and gratitude.

Lamb had been brought up an Unitarian, but he appears to have been occasionally fluctuating in a matter as to which boys are not apt to entertain very rigid opinions. At one time he longed to be with superior thinkers. "I am always longing to be with men more excellent than myself," are his words. At another time he writes "I have had thoughts of turning Quaker, lately." A visit, however, to one of the Quaker meetings in 1797, decides him against such conversion: "This cured me of Quakerism. I love it in the books of Penn and Woolmar; but I detest the vanity of man, thinking he speaks by the Spirit." A similar story

is told of Coleridge. Mr. Justice Coleridge's statement is "He told us a humourous story of his enthusiastic fondness for Quakers, when at Cambridge, and his attending one of their meetings, which had entirely cured him."

In 1797 Charles Lamb (who had been introduced to Southey by Coleridge two years previously) accompanied Lloyd to a little village near Christchurch in Hampshire, where Southey was at that time reading. This little holiday (of a fortnight) seems to have converted the acquaintanceship between Southey and Lamb into something like intimacy. He then paid another visit (which he had long meditated) to Coleridge, who was residing at Stowey. It must have been shortly after this first visit (for Lamb went again to Stowey, and met Wordsworth there in 1801), that Coleridge undertook the office of minister to an Unitarian congregation at Shrewsbury, and preached there, as detailed by Hazlitt in the manner already set forth. In 1798 he took his departure for Germany, and this led to a familiar correspondence between Lamb and

Southey. The opening of Lamb's humour may probably be referred to this friendship with a congenial humourist, and one like himself, taking a strong interest in worldly matters. Coleridge, between whom and Lamb there was not much similarity of feeling, beyond their common love for poetry and religious writings, was absent, and Lamb was enticed by the kindred spirit of Southey into the accessible regions of humour. These two friends never arrived at that close friendship which had been forming between Coleridge and Lamb ever since their school-days at Christ's Hospital. But they interchanged ideas on poetical and humourous topics, and did not perplex themselves with anything speculative or transcendental. The first letter to Southey, which has been preserved (July, 1798), announces that Lamb is ready to enter into any jocose contest. It includes a list of queries to be defended by Coleridge at Leipsic or Gottingen; the first of which was "Whether God loves a lying angel better than a true man?" Some of these queries, in all probability, had relation to Coleridge's own infirm-

ities: at all events, they were sent over to him in reply to the benediction which he had thought proper to bequeath to Charles on leaving England. "Poor Lamb, if he wants *any knowledge* he may apply to *me*." I must believe that this message was jocose, otherwise it would have been insolent in the extreme degree. Coleridge's answers to the queries above adverted to are not known; I believe that the proffered knowledge was not afforded so readily as it was demanded.—It has been surmised that there was some interruption of the good feeling between Coleridge and Lamb about this period of their lives; but I cannot discern this in the letters that occurred between the two schoolfellows. The message of Coleridge, and the questions in reply, occur in 1798; and in May, 1800, there is a letter from Lamb to Coleridge, and subsequently two others, in the same year, all couched in the old customary, friendly tone. In addition to this, Charles Lamb, many years afterwards, said that there had been an uninterrupted friendship of fifty years between them. In one letter of Lamb's, indeed (17th

March, 1800), it appears that his early notions of Coleridge being a "very good man" had been traversed by some doubts; but these "foolish impressions" were shortlived, and did not apparently form any check to the continuance of their lifelong friendship.

It is clear that Lamb's judgment was at this time becoming independent. In one of his letters to Coleridge, when comparing his friend's merits with those of Southey, he says, "Southey has no pretensions to vie with you in the sublime of poetry, but he tells a plain story better." Even to Southey he is equally candid. Writing to him on the subject of a volume of poems which he had lately published, he remarks, "The Rose is the only insipid poem in the volume; it has neither thorns nor sweetness."

In 1798 or 1799, Lamb contributed to the Annual Anthology (which Mr. Cottle, a bookseller of Bristol, published,) jointly with Coleridge and Southey. In 1800 he was introduced by Coleridge to Godwin. It is clear that Charles's intimacy with Coleridge, and Southey, and Lloyd,

was not productive of unmitigated pleasure. For the 'Antijacobin' made its appearance about this time, and denounced them all in a manner which in the present day would itself be denounced as infamous. Some of these gentlemen (Lamb's friends), in common with many others, augured at first favourably of the actors in the great French Revolution, and this had excited much displeasure in the Tory ranks. Accordingly they were represented as being guilty of blasphemy and slander, and as being adorers of a certain French revolutionist, named Lepaux; of whom Lamb at all events was entirely ignorant. They were, moreover, the subject of a caricature by Gilray, in which Lamb and Lloyd were portrayed as toad and frog. I cannot think with Sir T. Talfourd, that all these libels were excusable, on the ground of the "sportive wit" of the offending parties. Lamb's writings had no reference whatever to political subjects; they were, on the contrary, as the first writings of a young man generally are, serious,—even religious. Referring to Coleridge, it is

stated that he "was dishonoured at Cambridge for preaching Deism, and that he had since left his native country, and left his poor children fatherless, and his wife destitute:" *ex his disce his friends Lamb and Southey.* A scurrilous libel of this stamp would now be rejected by all persons of good feeling or good character. It would be spurned by a decent publication, or if published would be consigned to the justice of a jury.

The little story of Rosamond Gray was wrought out of the artist's brain in the year 1798, stimulated, as Lamb confesses, by the old ballad of "An old woman clothed in gray," which he had been reading. It is defective as a regular tale. It wants circumstance and probability, and is slenderly provided with character. There is moreover no construction in the narrative, and little or no progress in the events. Yet it is very daintily told. The mind of the author wells out in the purest streams. Having to deal with one foul incident, the tale is nevertheless without speck or blemish. A virgin nymph, born of a lily, could not have unfolded her thoughts more delicately. And, in

spite of its improbability, Rosamond Gray is very pathetic. It touches the sensitive points in young hearts; and it was by no means without success; the author's first success. It sold much better than his poems, and added "a few pounds" to his slender income.

George Dyer, once a pupil in Christ's Hospital, possessing a good reputation as a classical scholar, and who had preceded Lamb in the school, about this time came into the circle of his familiars. Dyer was one of the simplest and most inoffensive men in the world; in his heart there existed nothing but what was altogether pure and unsophisticated. He seemed never to have outgrown the innocence of childhood; or rather he appeared to be without those germs or first principles of evil which sometimes begin to show themselves even in childhood itself. He was not only without any of the dark passions himself, but he would not perceive them in others. He looked only on the sunshine. Hazlitt, speaking of him in his "Conversation of Authors," says, "He lives amongst the old authors, if he does not enter much into their spirit. He

handles the covers, and turns over the pages, and is familiar with the names and dates. He is busy and self-involved. He hangs like a film and cobweb upon letters, or is like the dust upon the outside of knowledge, which should not too rudely be brushed aside. He follows learning as its shadow, but as such he is respectable. He browses on the husks and leaves of books." And Lamb says, "The Gods, by denying him the very faculty of discrimination, have effectually cut off every seed of envy in his bosom."

Dyer was very thin and short in person, and was extremely near-sighted; and his motions were often (apparently) spasmodic. His means of living were very scanty; he subsisted mainly by supervising the press, being employed for that purpose by booksellers when they were printing Greek or Latin books. He dwelt in Clifford's Inn, "like a dove in an asp's nest," as Charles Lamb wittily says; and he might often have been seen with a classical volume in his hand, and another in his pocket, walking slowly along Fleet-street or its neighbourhood, unconscious of gazers; cogitating

over some sentence, the correctness of which it was his duty to determine. You might meet him murmuring to himself in a low voice, and apparently tasting the flavour of the words. Dyer's knowledge of the drama (which formed part of the subject of his first publication), may be guessed, by his having read Shakespeare, "an irregular genius," and having dipped into Rowe and Otway; but never having heard of any other writers in that class. In absence of mind, he probably exceeded every other living man. Lamb has set forth one instance (which I know to be a fact) of Dyer's forgetfulness, in his "Oxford in the Vacation;" and to this various others might be added, such as his emptying his snuff-box into the teapot when he was preparing breakfast for a hungry friend, &c. But it is scarcely worth while to chronicle minutely the harmless foibles of this inoffensive old man. If I had to write his epitaph I should say that he was neither much respected nor at all hated; too good to dislike, too inactive to excite great affection; and that he was as simple as the daisy, which we think we admire, and daily tread under foot.

In 1799 Charles Lamb visited Cambridge, and there, through the introduction of Lloyd, made the important acquaintance of Mr. Thomas Manning, then a mathematical tutor in the university. This soon grew into a close intimacy. Charles readily perceived the intellectual value of Manning; and seems to have eagerly sought his friendship, which, he says (December, 1799), will render the prospect of the approaching century very pleasant. "That century must needs commence auspiciously for me" (he adds) "that brings with it Manning's friendship as an earnest of its after gifts." At first sight it appears strange that there should be formed a close friendship between a youth, a beginner or student in poetry (no more), and a professor of science at one of our great seats of learning. But these men had, I suppose, an intuitive perception of each other's excellences. And there sometimes lie behind the outer projections of character a thousand concealed shades which readily intermingle with those of other people. There were amongst Lamb's tender thoughts, and Manning's mathematical tendencies,

certain neutral qualities which assimilated with each other, and which eventually served to cement that union between them which continued unshaken during the lives of both. Lamb's correspondence assumed more character, and showed more critical quality, after the intimacy with Manning began. His acquaintance with Southey, in the first instance, had the effect of increasing the activity of his mind. Previously to that time, his letters had consisted chiefly of witticisms (clever, indeed, but not of surpassing quality), religious thoughts, reminiscences, &c., for the most part unadorned and simple. Afterwards, especially after the Manning era, they exhibit far greater weight of meaning, more fecundity, original thoughts, and brilliant allusions; as if the imagination had begun to awaken and enrich the understanding. Manning's solid, scientific mind had, without doubt, the effect of arousing the sleeping vigour of Lamb's intellect.

A long correspondence took place between them. At first Lamb sent Manning his opinions only; "opinion is a species of property that I am always

desirous of sharing with my friends." Then he communicates the fact that George Dyer, "that good-natured poet, is now more than nine months gone with twin volumes of odes." Afterwards he tells him that he is reading Burnet's history of his own times; "full of scandal, as all true history is." On Manning quitting England for China (1806), the letters become less frequent; they continue, however, during his absence; one of them, surpassing the Elia essay, to "Distant Correspondents," is very remarkable; and when the Chinese traveller returned to London, he was very often a guest at Lamb's residence. I have repeatedly met him there. His countenance was that of an intelligent, steady, almost serious man. His journey to the celestial empire had not been unfruitful of good; his talk at all times being full of curious information, including much anecdote, and some (not common) speculations on men and things. When he returned, he brought with him a native of China, whom he took one evening to a ball in London; where the foreigner from Shanghai, or Pekin, enquired with

much naïveté as to the amount of money which his host had given to the dancers for their evening's performance, and was persuaded with difficulty that their exertions were entirely gratuitous. Manning had a curious habit of bringing with him (in his waistcoat pocket) some pods of the red pepper, whenever he expected to partake of a meal. His original intention (as I understood) when he set out for China, was to frame and publish a Chinese and English dictionary; yet—although he brought over much material for the purpose—his purpose was never carried into effect. Lamb had great love and admiration for him. In a letter to Coleridge, in after years (1826), he says, "I am glad you esteem Manning; though you see but his husk or shrine. He discloses not, save to select worshippers; and will leave the world without any one hardly but me knowing how stupendous a creature he is."

During these years Lamb's correspondence with Coleridge, Wordsworth, Walter Wilson, and Manning (principally with Manning) goes on. It is sometimes critical, sometimes jocose. He discusses

the merits of various authors, and more than once expresses his extreme distaste for didactic writing. Now, he says, it is too directly instructive. Then he complains that the knowledge, insignificant and vapid as it is, must come in the *shape* of knowledge. He could not obtain at Newberry's shop any of the old "classics of the Nursery," he says; whilst "Mrs. Barbauld's and Mrs. Trimmer's nonsense lay in piles about."—His own domestic affairs struggle on as usual; at one time calm and pleasant; at another time troubled and uncomfortable; owing to the frequent recurrence of his sister's malady. In general he bore these changes with fortitude; I do not observe more than one occasion on which (being then himself ill) his firmness seemed altogether to give way. In 1798, indeed, he had said, "I consider her perpetually on the brink of madness." But in May, 1800, his old servant Hetty having died, and Mary (sooner than usual) falling ill again, Charles was obliged to remove her to an asylum; and was left in the house alone with Hetty's dead body. "My heart is quite sick" (he cries), "and I

don't know where to look for relief. My head is very bad. I almost wish that Mary were dead." This was the one solitary cry of anguish that he uttered, during his long years of anxiety and suffering. At all other times he bowed his head in silence, uncomplaining.

Charles Lamb, with his sister, left Little Queen Street, on or before 1800; in which year he seems to have migrated, first to Chapel Street, Pentonville; next to Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane; and finally to No. 16, Mitre Court Buildings, in the Temple, "a pistol shot off Baron Masere's;" and here he resided for about nine years.

It was during his stay at Pentonville that he "fell in love," with a young Quaker, called Hester Savory. As (he confesses) "I have never spoken to her during my life," it may be safely concluded that the attachment was essentially Platonic. This was the young girl who inspired those verses, now so widely known and admired. I remember them as being the first lines which I ever saw of Charles Lamb's writing.

I remember and admire them still; for their natural unaffected style; no pretence, no straining for images and fancies flying too high above the subject; but dealing with thoughts that were near his affections, in a fit and natural manner. The conclusion of the poem, composed and sent after her death (in February, 1803) to Manning, who was then in Paris, is very sad and tender:—

My sprightly neighbour, gone before
To that unknown and silent shore,
Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
Some summer morning?

When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
A bliss that will not go away,
A sweet forewarning.

CHAPTER IV.

(MIGRATIONS) — "JOHN WOODVIL" — BLACKESMOOR — WORDSWORTH — RICKMAN — GODWIN — VISIT TO THE LAKES — MORNING POST — HAZLITT — NELSON — ODE TO TOBACCO — DRAMATIC SPECIMENS, &c. — INNER TEMPLE LANE — REFLECTOR — HOGARTH AND SIR J. REYNOLDS — LEIGH HUNT — LAMB, HAZLITT, AND HUNT — RUSSELL STREET AND THEATRICAL FRIENDS.

It is not always easy to fix Charles Lamb's doings (writings or migrations) to any precise date. The year may generally be ascertained; but the day or month is often a matter of surmise only. Even the dates of the letters are often derived from the post-marks, or are sometimes conjectured from circumstances.* Occasion-

* As Lamb's changes of residence were frequent, it may be convenient to chronicle them in order, in this place, although the precise date of his moving from one to another can scarcely be specified in a single instance. 1775, Charles Lamb, born in Crown Office Row, Temple. 1795, lives at No. 7, Little Queen Street, Holborn. 1800 (early), lives at No. 45, Chapel Street, Pentonville. Same year, lives in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane. Same year, removes

ally the labours of a drama or of lyric poems traverse several years, and are not to be referred to any one definite period. Thus "John Woodvil" (his tragedy) was begun in 1799, printed in 1800, and submitted to Mr. Kemble (then manager of Drury Lane Theatre) in the Christmas of that year; but was not published until 1801.

After this tragedy had been in Mr. Kemble's hands for about a year, Lamb naturally became urgent to hear his decision upon it. Upon applying for this he found that his play was—lost! This was at once acknowledged and a "courteous request made for another copy, if I had one by me." Luckily, another copy existed. The "first runnings" of a genius were not therefore altogether lost, by having been cast, without a care, into the dusty limbo of the theatre. The other copy was at once supplied, and the play very speedily rejected. It was afterwards fa-

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to No. 16, Mitre Court Buildings, Temple. 1809, removes to No. 4, Inner Temple Lane. 1817, removes to Russell Street, Covent Garden. 1823, removes to Colebrook Row, Islington. 1826, removes to Enfield. 1829, removes into lodgings, in Enfield. 1830, lodges in Southampton Buildings. 1833, lives at Mrs. Walden's, in Church Street, Edmonton; where he dies on 27th December, 1834.

cetiously brought forward in one of the early numbers of the Edinburgh Review, and there noticed as a rude specimen of the earliest age of the drama, "older than Æschylus!" Lamb met these accidents of fortune manfully, and did not abstain from exercising his own Shandean humour thereon. It must be confessed that "John Woodvil" is not a tragedy likely to bring much success to a playhouse. It is such a drama as a young poet, full of love for the Elizabethan writers, and without any knowledge of the requisitions of the stage, would be likely to produce. There is no plot; little probability in the story; which itself is not very scientifically developed. There are some pretty lines, especially some which have often been the subject of quotation; but there is not much merit in the characters of the drama, with the exception of the heroine, who is a heroine of the "purest water." Lamb's friend, Southey, in writing to a correspondent pronounces the following opinion. "Lamb is printing his play, which will please you by the exquisite beauty of its poetry, and provoke you by the exquisite silliness of its story."

In October, 1799, Lamb went to see the remains of the old house (Gilston) in Hertfordshire, where his grandmother once lived, and the "old church where the bones of my honoured granddame lie." This visit was, in later years, recorded in the charming paper entitled "Blakesmoor in H——shire." He found that the house where he had spent his pleasant holidays, when a little boy, had been demolished; it was, in fact, taken down for the purpose of reconstruction; but out of the ruins he conjures up pleasant ghosts, whom he restores and brings before a younger generation. There are few of his papers in which the past years of his life are more delightfully revived. The house had been "reduced to an antiquity." But we go with him to the grass plat, where he used to read Cowley; to the tapestried bedrooms where the mythological people of Ovid used to stand forth, half alive; even to "that haunted bedroom in which old Sarah Battle died," and into which he "used to creep in a passion of fear." These things are all touched with a delicate pen; mixed

and incorporated with tender reflections; for "The solitude of childhood" (as he says) "is not so much the mother of thought as the feeder of love." With him it was both.

Lamb became acquainted with Wordsworth when he visited Coleridge, in the summer of 1800. At that time his old schoolfellow lived at Stowey, and the greater poet was his neighbour. It is not satisfactorily shown in what manner the poetry of Wordsworth first attracted the notice of Charles Lamb, nor its first effect upon him. Perhaps the verse of Coleridge was not a bad stepping-stone to that elevation which enabled Charles to look into the interior of Wordsworth's mind. The two poets were not unlike in some respects; although Coleridge seldom (except perhaps in the "Ancient Mariner") ventured into the plain downright phraseology of the other. It is very soon apparent, however, that Lamb was able to admit Wordsworth's great merits. In August, 1800 (just after the completion of his visit to Stowey), he writes, "I would pay five and forty thousand carriages,"

(parcel fares,) "to read Wordsworth's tragedy. Pray give me an order on Longman for the 'Lyrical Ballads.'" And in October, 1800, the two authors must have been on familiar terms with each other; for in a letter addressed by Lamb to Wordsworth, "Dear Wordsworth," it appears that the latter had requested him to advance money for the purchase of books, to a considerable amount. This was at a time when Lamb was "not plethorically abounding in cash." The books required an outlay of eight pounds, and Lamb had not the sum then in his possession. "It is a scurvy thing" (he writes) "to cry give me the money first; and I am the first of the Lambs that has done this for many centuries." Shortly afterwards Lamb sent his play to Wordsworth, who (this was previous to 30 January, 1801) appears to have invited Charles to visit him in Cumberland. Our humourist did not accept this invitation, being doubtful whether he could "afford so desperate a journey," and being (he says) "not at all romance-bit about Nature;" the earth and sea

and sky, being, "when all is said, but a house to live in."

It is not part of my task to adjust the claims of the various writers of verse in this country to their stations in the Temple of Fame. If Keats was by nature the most essentially a poet in the present century, there is little doubt that Wordsworth has left his impress more broadly and more permanently than any other of our later writers upon the literature of England. There are barren, unpeopled wastes in the "Excursion," and in some of the longer poems; but when his Genius stirs, we find ourselves in rich places which have no parallel in any book since the death of Milton. When his lyrical ballads first appeared, they encountered much opposition and some contempt. Readers had not for many years been accustomed to drink the waters of Helicon pure and undefiled; and Wordsworth (a prophet of the true faith) had to gird up his loins, march into the desert, and prepare for battle. He has, indeed, at last achieved a conquest; but a long course of time, although sure of eventual success, elapsed before he could

boast of victory. The battle has been perilous. When the "Excursion" was published (in 1814) Lamb wrote a review of it for "The Quarterly Review." Whatever might have been the actual fitness of this performance, it seems to have been hacked to pieces; more than a third of the substance cut away; the warm expressions converted into cold ones; and (in Lamb's phrase) "the eyes pulled out and the bleeding sockets left." This mangling (or amendment, as I suppose it was considered) was the work of the late Mr. Gifford. Charles had a great admiration for Wordsworth. It was short of prostration, however. He states that the style of "Peter Bell" does not satisfy him: but "'Hartleap Well' is the tale for me," are his words in 1819.

I have a vivid recollection of Wordsworth, who was a very grave man, with strong features and a deep voice. I met him first at the chambers (they were in the Temple) of Mr. Henry Crabb Robinson, one of the most amiable of men. I was a young versifier, and Wordsworth was just emerging out of a cloud of ignorant contumely

into the sunrise of his fame. He was fond (perhaps too fond) of reciting his own poetry, before friends and strangers. I was not attracted by his manner, which was almost too solemn, but I was deeply impressed by some of the weighty notes in his voice, when he was delivering out his oracles. I forget whether it was "Dion" or the beautiful poem of "Laodamia" that he read; but I remembered the reading long afterwards, as one recollects the roll of the spent thunder.

I met Wordsworth occasionally afterwards, at Charles Lamb's, at Mr. Rogers's, and elsewhere, and once he did me the honour to call upon me. I remember that he had a very gentle aspect when he looked at my children. He took the hand of my dear daughter (who died lately) in his hand, and spoke some words to her, the recollection of which, perhaps, helped, with other things, to incline her to poetry. Hazlitt says that Wordsworth's face, notwithstanding his constitutional gravity, sometimes revealed indications of dry humour. And once, at a morning visit, I heard him give an account of his having breakfasted in

company with Coleridge, and allowed him to expatiate to the extent of his lungs. "How could you permit him to go on and weary himself?" said Rogers; "why, you are to meet him at dinner this evening." "Yes," replied Wordsworth; "I know that very well; but we like to take the *sting* out of him beforehand."

About a year after Lamb's first knowledge of Manning, his small stock of friends was enlarged by the acquisition of Mr. John Rickman, one of the clerks of the House of Commons. "He is a most pleasant hand" (writes Lamb), "a fine rattling fellow, who has gone through life laughing at solemn apes; himself hugely literate, from matter of fact, to Xenophon and Plato: he can talk Greek with Porson, and nonsense with me." "He understands you" (he adds) "the first time. You never need speak twice to him. Fullest of matter, with least verbosity." A year or two afterwards, when Rickman went to Ireland, Lamb wrote to Manning:—"I have lost by his going what seems to me I never can recover,—*a finished man*. I almost dare pronounce you never saw his

equal. His memory will come to me as the brazen serpent to the Israelites." Robert Southey also, when writing to his brother (in 1804), says:—"Coleridge and Rickman, with William Taylor, make my Trinity of living greatness." A voluminous correspondence took place between Southey and Rickman, ranging from 1800 to 1839, in the course of which a variety of important subjects—namely, History, Antiquities, Political Economy, Poor Law, and general Politics, were deliberately argued between them. From this it appears that Southey, whose reading was very extensive, must have had great trust in the knowledge and judgment of Rickman.

Lamb's acquaintance with Godwin, Holcroft, and Clarkson, was formed about this time. Godwin had been introduced to Lamb by Coleridge, in 1800. The first interview is made memorable by Godwin's opening question; "And pray, Mr. Lamb, are you toad or frog?" This enquiry, having reference to Gilray's offensive caricature, did not afford promise of a very cheerful intimacy. Lamb, however, who accorded great respect to

Godwin's intellect, did not resent it; but received his approaches favourably, and indeed entertained him at breakfast the next morning. The acquaintance afterwards expanded into familiarity: but I never observed the appearance of any warm friendship between them. Godwin's precision and extreme coldness of manner (perhaps of disposition) prevented this; and Lamb was able, through all his admiration of the other's power, to discern those points in his character, which were obnoxious to his own. Some years previously, Charles had entertained much dislike to the philosopher's opinions, and referred to him as "that Godwin;" and afterwards, when eulogising the quick and fine intellect of Rickman, he says, "He does not want explanation, translations, limitations, as Godwin does, when you make an assertion." When Godwin published his "Essay on Sepulchres," wherein he professed to erect a wooden slab and a white cross, to be *perpetually* renewed to the end of time ("to survive the fall of empires," as Miss Lamb says), in order to distinguish the site of every great man's grave,

Lamb speaks of the project in these terms: "Godwin has written a pretty absurd book about Sepulchres. He was affronted, because I told him that it was better than Hervey, but not so good as Sir Thomas Browne." Sufficient intimacy, however, had arisen between them to induce Lamb to write a facetious epilogue to Godwin's tragedy of "Antonio; or, the Soldier's Return." This came out in 1800, and was very speedily damned; although Lamb said that "it had one fine line;" which indeed he repeated occasionally. Godwin bore this failure, it must be admitted, without being depressed by it, although he was a very poor man, and although he was "£500 *ideal* money out of pocket by the failure."

In 1802, Lamb visited Coleridge, who was then living near Keswick, in Cumberland. For the first time in his life, he beheld lakes and mountains; and the effect upon him was startling and unexpected. It was much like the impression made by the first sight of the Alps upon Leigh Hunt, who had theretofore always maintained that those merely great heaps of earth ought to

have no effect upon a properly constituted mind; but he freely confessed afterwards, that he had been mistaken. Lamb had been more than once invited to visit the romantic Lake country. He had no desire to inspect the Ural chain, where the malachite is hidden, nor the silver regions of Potosi; but he was all at once affected by a desire of "visiting remote regions." It was a sudden irritability, which could only be quieted by travel. Charles and his sister therefore went, without giving any notice to Coleridge, who, however, received them very kindly, and gave up all his time in order to show them the wonders of the neighbourhood. The visitors arrived there in a "gorgeous sunset" (the only one that Lamb saw during his stay in the country), and thought that they had got "into fairy land." "We entered Coleridge's study" (he writes to Manning, shortly afterwards) "just in the dusk, when the mountains were all dark. Such an impression I never received from objects of sight, nor do I suppose I ever can again. Glorious creatures, Skiddaw, &c. I shall never forget how ye lay about that

night, like an entrenchment; gone to bed, as it seemed, for the night."

They went to Coleridge's House, in which "he had a large antique, ill-shaped room, with an old organ, never played upon, an Eolian harp, and shelves of scattered folios;" and remained there three weeks, visiting Wordsworth's Cottage, he himself being absent, and meeting the Clarksons ("good, hospitable people"). They tarried there one night, and met Lloyd. They clambered up to the top of Skiddaw, "and went to Grassmere, Ambleside, Ullswater, and over" the middle of Helvellyn." Coleridge then dwelt upon a small hill by the side of Keswick, quite "enveloped on all sides by a net of mountains." On his return to London, Lamb wrote to his late host, saying, "I feel I shall remember your mountains to the last day of my life. They haunt me perpetually. I am like a man who has been falling in love unknown to himself, which he finds out when he leaves the lady." He soon subsided, however, into his old natural metropolitan happiness.

Wordsworth was not in the Lake country when Lamb visited Coleridge, but after his return the great poet visited Charles in London; passed some time there; and then departed for Yorkshire, where he went in order to be married.

At this time Lamb contributed (generally facetiæ) to various newspapers, now forgotten. One of them, it was said jocosely, had "two and twenty readers; including the printer, the pressmen, and the devil." But he was still very poor; so poor that Coleridge offered to supply him with prose translations from the German, in order that he might versify them for the "Morning Post," and thus obtain a little money. In one of his letters Lamb says:—"If I got or could but get £50 a year only, in addition to what I have, I should live in affluence."

About the time that he is writing this, he is recommending Chapman's "Homer" to Coleridge; is refusing to admit Coleridge's *bona fide* debt to himself of £15; is composing Latin letters; and in other respects deporting himself like a "gentleman who lives at home at ease;" not like a poor

clerk, obliged to husband his small means, and to deny himself the cheap luxury of books that he had long coveted. "Do you remember" (his sister says to him, in the Essay on "Old China") "the brown suit that grew so threadbare, all because of that folio of Beaumont and Fletcher that you dragged home late at night from Barker's, in Covent Garden;" "when you set off near ten o'clock, on Saturday night, from Islington, fearing you should be too late; and when you lugged it home, wishing it was twice as cumbersome," &c.

These realities of poverty, very imperfectly covered over by words of fiction, are very touching. It is deeply interesting, that Essay, where the rare enjoyments of a poor scholar are brought into contrast and relief with the indifference that grows upon him when his increased income enables him to acquire any objects he pleases. Those things are no longer distinguished as "enjoyments" which are not purchased by a sacrifice. "A purchase is but a purchase now. Formerly it used to be a triumph. A thing was worth buying, when we felt the money that we paid for it."

(1804.) The intimacy of that extraordinary man, William Hazlitt, was the great gain of Lamb at this period of his life. If Lamb's youngest and tenderest reverence was given to Coleridge, Hazlitt's intellect must also have commanded his later permanent respect. Without the imagination and extreme facility of Coleridge, he had almost as much subtlety and far more steadfastness of mind. Perhaps this steadfastness remained sometimes until it took the colour of obstinacy; but, as in the case of his constancy to the first Napoleon, it was obstinacy riveted and made firm by some concurring respect. I do not know that Hazlitt had the more affectionate nature of the two; but assuredly he was less tossed about and his sight less obscured by floating fancies and vast changing projects (*muscæ volitantes*) than the other. To the one is ascribed fierce and envious passions; coarse thoughts and habits—(he has indeed been crowned by defamation); whilst to Coleridge has been awarded reputation and glory, and praise from a thousand tongues. To secure justice we must wait for unbiassed posterity.

I meet, at present, with few persons who recollect much of Hazlitt. Some profess to have heard nothing of him except his prejudices and violence; but his prejudices were few, and his violence (if violence he had), was of very rare occurrence. He was extremely patient, indeed, although earnest when discussing points in politics, respecting which he held very strong and decided opinions. But he circulated his thoughts on many other subjects, whereon he ought not to have excited offence or opposition. He wrote (and he wrote well), upon many things lying far beyond the limits of politics. To use his own words, "I have at least glanced over a number of subjects; painting, poetry, prose, plays, politics, parliamentary speakers, metaphysical lore, books, men, and things." This list, extensive as it is, does not specify very precisely all the subjects on which he wrote. His thoughts range over the literature of Elizabeth and James's times, and of the time of Charles II.; over a large portion of modern literature; over the distinguishing character of men, their peculiarities of mind and manners; over the

wonders of poetry, the subtleties of metaphysics, and the luminous regions of art. In painting, his criticisms (it is prettily said, by Leigh Hunt) cast a light upon the subject, like the glory reflected "from a painted window." I myself have, in my library, eighteen volumes of Hazlitt's works, and I do not possess all that he published. Besides being an original thinker, Hazlitt excelled in conversation. He was, moreover, a very temperate liver: yet his enemies proclaimed to the world that he was wanting even in sobriety. During the thirteen years that I knew him intimately, and (at certain seasons) saw him almost every day, I know that he drank nothing stronger than water; except tea, indeed, in which he indulged in the morning. Had he been as temperate in his political views as in his cups, he would have escaped the slander that pursued him through life.

The great intimacy between these two distinguished writers, Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt (for they had known each other before), seems to have commenced in a singular manner.

They were one day at Godwin's, when "a fierce dispute was going on between Holcroft and Coleridge, as to which was best, 'Man as he was, or Man as he is to be.' 'Give me,' says Lamb, 'man as he is *not* to be.'" "This was the beginning" (Hazlitt says) "of a friendship which, I believe, still continues." Hazlitt married in 1805, and his wife soon became familiar with Mary Lamb. Indeed, Charles and his sister more than once visited the Hazlitts, who at that time lived at Winterslow, near Salisbury Plain; and enjoyed their visits greatly, walking from eight to twenty miles a day, and seeing Wilton, Stonehenge, and the other (to them unaccustomed) sights of the country. "The quiet, lazy, delicious month" passed there, is referred to, in one of Miss Lamb's pleasant letters. And the acquaintance soon deepened into friendship. Whatever goodwill was exhibited by Hazlitt (and there was much) is repaid by Lamb in his letter to Southey, published in the "London Magazine" (October, 1823), wherein he places on record his pride

and admiration of his friend. "So far from being ashamed of the intimacy" (he says), "it is my boast that I was able, for so many years, to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding or expecting to find such another companion."

Lamb's respect for men and things did not depend on repute. His fondness for old books seldom (never, perhaps, except in the single case of the Duchess of Newcastle,) deluded him into a respect for old books which were without merit. He required that excellence should be combined with antiquity. A great name was generally to him simply a great name; no more. If it had lasted through centuries, indeed, as in the case of Michael Angelo, then he admitted that "a great name implied greatness." He did not think that greatness lay in the "thews and sinews," or in the bulk alone. When Nelson was walking on the quay at Yarmouth, the mob cried out in derision, "What! make that little fellow a captain!" Lamb thought otherwise; and in regret for the death of that great seaman, he says,

"I have followed him ever since I saw him walking in Pall Mall, *looking just as a hero should look;*" (*i.e.*, simply). "He was the only pretence of a great man we had." The large stage blusterer and ostentatious drawcansir were never, in Lamb's estimation, models for heroes. In the case of the first Napoleon also, he writes:—"He is a fine fellow, as my barber says; and I should not mind standing bareheaded at his table to do him service in his fall." This was in August, 1815.

The famous "Ode to Tobacco" was written in 1805, and the pretty stories founded on the plays of Shakespeare were composed or translated about the year 1806; Lamb taking the tragic, and his sister the other share of the version. These tales were to produce about £60; to them a sum which was most important, for he and Mary at that time hailed the addition of £20 to his salary (on the retirement of an elder clerk) as a grand addition to their comforts.

Charles was at this period (February, 1806) at work upon a farce, to be called "Mr. H.;"

from which he says, "if it has a 'good run' I shall get £200, and I hope £100 for the copyright." "Mr. H." (which rested solely upon the absurdity of a name, which after all was not irresistibly absurd) was accepted at the theatre, but unfortunately it had *not* 'a good run.' It failed, not quite undeservedly perhaps, for (although it has since had some success in America) there was not much probability of its prosperity in London. It was acted once (10th December, 1806), and was announced for repetition on the following evening, but was withdrawn. Lamb's courage and good humour did not fail. He joked about it to Wordsworth, said that he had many fears about it, and admitted that "John Bull required solider fare than a bare letter." As he says, in his letter to the poet, "a hundred hisses (hang the word, I write it like kisses) outweigh a thousand claps. The former come more directly from the heart. Well," (he adds) "it is withdrawn, and there's an end."

In 1807 were published "Specimens of Dramatic

Poets cotemporary with Shakespeare," and these made Lamb known as a man conversant with our old English literature, and helped mainly to direct the taste of the public to those fine writers. The book brought repute (perhaps a little money) to him. Soon afterwards he published "The Adventures of Ulysses," which was intended to be an introduction to the reading of "Telemachus," always a popular book. These "adventures" were derived from Chapman's "Translation of Homer," of which Lamb says, "Chapman is divine; and my abridgement has not, I hope, quite emptied him of his divinity."

In or about 1808 Miss Lamb's pretty little stories called "Mrs. Leicester's School" (to which Charles contributed three tales) were published; and soon afterwards a small book entitled "Poetry for Children," being a joint publication by brother and sister, came out. "It was done by me and Mary in the last six months" (January, 1809). It does not appear to what extent, if at all, it added to the poor clerk's means.

In the same year (as Miss Lamb writes in

December, 1808), Charles was invited by Tom Sheridan to write some scenes in a speaking Pantomime; the other parts of which (the eloquence not of words) had been already manufactured by Tom and his more celebrated father, Richard Brinsley. Lamb and Tom Sheridan had been, it seems, communicative over a bottle of claret, when an agreement for the above purpose was entered into between them. This was subsequently carried into effect, and a drama was composed. This drama, still extant in the British Museum, in Lamb's own writing, appears to be a species of comic opera, the scene of which is laid in Gibraltar, but is without a name. I have not seen it, but speak upon the report of others.

In 1809 Lamb moved once more into the Temple, now to the top story of No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, "where the household gods are slow to come, but where I mean to live and die," (he says). From this place (since pulled down and rebuilt), he writes to Manning, who is in China; "Come, and bring any of your friends the Mandarins with you. My best room

commands a court, in which there are trees and a pump, the water of which is excellent cold—with brandy; and not very insipid without." He sends Manning some of his little books, to give him 'some idea of European literature.' It is in this letter (January, 1810) that he speaks of Braham and his singing, which I have elsewhere alluded to; of Kate with nine stars * * * * * * * * * (" though she is but one"); of his book (for children) " on titles of honour," exemplifying the eleven gradations, by which Mr. C. Lamb rises in succession to be Baron, Marquis, Duke, and Emperor Lamb, and finally Pope Innocent, and other lively matters fit to solace an English mathematician self-banished to China.

In July, 1810, an abstinence from all spirituous liquors took place. Lamb says that his sister has " taken to water like a hungry otter," whilst he " limps after her " for virtue's sake; but he is " full of cramps and rheumatism, and cold internally, so that fire don't warm him." It is scarcely necessary to state that the period of entire abstinence was very transient.

A quarterly magazine, called "The Reflector," was published in the autumn of 1810, and contained essays by Charles Lamb and several other writers. Amongst these are some of the best of Lamb's earlier writings—namely, the paper on Hogarth and that on the Tragedies of Shakespeare. It is singular that these two essays, which are as fine as anything of a similar nature in English criticism, should have been almost unnoticed (undiscovered, except by literary friends) until the year 1818, when Lamb's works were collected and published. The grand passage on "Lear" has caused the Essay on the Shakespeare Tragedies to be well known. Less known is the Essay on Hogarth, although it is more elaborate and critical; the labour being quite necessary in this case, as the pretensions of Hogarth to the grand style had been denounced by Sir Joshua Reynolds. In affluence of genius, in variety and exuberance of thought, there surely can exist little comparison between Reynolds and Hogarth. Reynolds was, indeed the finest painter, especially the most

superb colourist, of the English school. But Hogarth was the greatest inventor,—the greatest discoverer of character, in the English or any other school. As a painter of manners he is unapproached. In a kindred walk, he traversed all the passions from the lowest mirth to the profoundest melancholy, possessing the tragic element in the most eminent degree. And if grandeur can exist—as I presume it can—in beings who have neither costume nor rank to set off their qualities, then some of the characters of Hogarth in essential grandeur are far beyond the conventional figures of many other artists. Pain and joy and poverty and human daring are not to be circumscribed by dress and fashion. Their seat is deeper (in the soul), and is altogether independent of such trivial accretions. In point of expression, I never saw the face of the madman (in the "Rake's Progress") exceeded in any picture, ancient or modern. "It is a face" (Lamb says) "that no one that has seen can easily forget." It is, as he argues, human suffering stretched to its utmost endurance. I cannot forbear directing the attention of the reader to

Lamb's bold and excellent defence of Hogarth. He will like both painter and author, I think, better than before. I have, indeed, been in company where young men, professing to be painters, spoke slightingly of Hogarth. To this I might have replied that Hogarth did not paint for the applause of tyros in art, but—for the world!

The "Reflector" was edited by an old Christ's Hospital boy, Mr. Leigh Hunt, who subsequently became and during their joint lives remained one of Lamb's most familiar friends. It was a quarterly magazine, and received, of course, the contributions of various writers; amongst whom were Mr. Barnes (of the "Times"), Barron Field, Dr. Aikin, Mr. Landseer (the elder), Charles Lamb, Octavius Gilchrist, Mitchell (the translator of Aristophanes), and Leigh Hunt himself. I do not observe Lamb's name appended to any of the articles in the first volume; but the second comprises the Essays on Hogarth and on Burial Societies, together with a paper on the Custom of Hissing at the Theatres, under the signature

of "Semel Damnatus." There is a good deal of humour in this paper (which has not been re-published, I believe). It professes to come from one of a club of condemned authors; no person being admissible as a member until he had been unequivocally damned.

I observe that in the letters, &c., of Lamb, which were published in 1841, and copiously commented on by Sir Thomas N. Talfourd (the editor), there is not much beyond a bare mention of Leigh Hunt's name, and no letter from Charles Lamb to Mr. Hunt is published. It is now too late to remedy this last defect; my recent endeavours to obtain such letters having resulted in disappointment: otherwise I should have been very glad to record the extent of Lamb's liking for a poor and able man whom I knew well for at least forty years. I know that at one time Lamb valued him, and that he always thought highly of his intellect, as indeed he has testified in his famous remonstrance to Southey. And in Mr. Hunt's autobiography I find abundant evidence of his admiration for Lamb, in a generous eulogy upon him.

Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt formed a remarkable trio of men; each of whom was decidedly different from the others. Only one of them (Hunt) cared much for praise. Hazlitt's sole ambition was to sell his essays, which he rated scarcely beyond their marketable value; and Lamb saw enough of the manner in which praise and censure were at that time distributed, to place any high value on immediate success. Of posterity neither of them thought. Leigh Hunt, from temperament, was more alive to pleasant influences (sunshine, freedom for work, rural walks, complimentary words) than the others. Hazlitt cared little for these things; a fierce argument or a well-contested game at rackets was more to his taste; whilst Lamb's pleasures (except perhaps from his pipe) lay amongst the books of the old English writers. His soul delighted in communion with ancient generations; more especially with men who had been unjustly forgotten. Hazlitt's mind attached itself to abstract subjects; Lamb's was more practical, and embraced men. Hunt was somewhat indifferent to persons as well

as to things, except in the cases of Shelley and Keats, and his own family; yet he liked poetry and poetical subjects. Hazlitt (who was ordinarily very shy) was the best talker of the three. Lamb said the most pithy and brilliant things. Hunt displayed the most ingenuity. All three sympathized often with the same persons or the same books; and this, no doubt, cemented the intimacy that existed between them for so many years. Moreover, each of them understood the others, and placed just value on their objections when any difference of opinion (not infrequent) arose between them. Without being debaters, they were accomplished talkers. They did not argue for the sake of conquest, but to strip off the mists and perplexities which sometimes obscure truth. These men—who lived long ago—had a great share of my regard. They were all slandered; chiefly by men who knew little of them, and nothing of their good qualities: or by men who saw them only through the mist of political or religious animosity. Perhaps it was partly for this reason that they came nearer to my heart.

All the three men, Lamb, Hazlitt, and Hunt, were throughout their lives Unitarians, as was also George Dyer; Coleridge was an Unitarian preacher in his youth, having seceded from the Church of England; to which, however, he returned, and was in his latter years a strenuous supporter of the National faith. George Dyer once sent a pamphlet to convert Charles to Unitarianism. "Dear blundering soul" (Lamb said), "why, I am as old a One Goddite as himself." To Southey Lamb writes, "Being, as you know, not quite a churchman, I felt a jealousy at the Church taking to herself the whole deserts of Christianity." His great, and indeed infinite reverence, nevertheless, for Christ is shown in his own Christian virtues and in constant expressions of reverence. In Hazlitt's Paper of "Persons one would wish to have seen," Lamb is made to refer to Jesus Christ as he "who once put on a semblance of mortality," and to say, "If he were to come into the room, we should all fall down and kiss the hem of his garment." I do not venture to comment on these delicate matters, where men like Hazlitt, and Lamb, and

Coleridge (the latter for a short time only) have entertained opinions which differ from those of the generality of their countrymen.

During these years, Mary Lamb's illnesses were frequent, as usual. Her relapses were not dependent on the seasons; they came in hot summers and with the freezing winters. The only remedy seems to have been extreme quiet, when any slight symptom of uneasiness was apparent. Charles (poor fellow) had to live, day and night, in the society of a person who was—mad! If any exciting talk occurred he had to dismiss his friend, with a whisper. If any stupor or extraordinary silence was observed, then he had to rouse her instantly. He has been seen to take the kettle from the fire and place it for a moment on her head-dress, in order to startle her into recollection. He lived in a state of constant anxiety;—and there was no help.

Not to neglect Charles Lamb's migrations, it should be noted that he moved his residence from Inner Temple Lane ("where he meant to live and die") into Russell Street, Covent Garden, in the

latter part of the year 1817. When there, he became personally acquainted with several members of the theatrical profession; amongst others, with Munden and Miss Kelly, for both of whom he entertained the highest admiration. One of the (Elia) Essays is written to celebrate Munden's histrionic talent; and in his letters he speaks of "Fanny Kelly's divine plain face." The Barbara S. of the second (or last) series of essays is, in fact, Miss Kelly herself. All his friends knew that he was greatly attached to her. He also became acquainted with Miss Burrell—afterwards Mrs. Gould—but who, he says, "remained uncoined." Subsequently he was introduced to Liston and Elliston, each of whom received tokens of his liking. The first was the subject of an amusing fictitious biography. In Lamb's words it was "a lying life of Liston," uncontaminated by a particle of truth. Munden, he says, had faces innumerable; Liston had only one; "but what a face!" he adds, admitting it to be beyond all vain description. Perhaps this subject of universal laughter and admiration never received such a

compliment; except from Hazlitt, who after commenting on Hogarth's excellences, his invention, his character, his satire, &c., concludes by saying, "I have never seen anything in the expression of comic humour equal to Hogarth's humour, except Liston's face."

In the course of time, official labour becomes tiresome, and the India House clerk grows splenetic. He complains sadly of his work. Even the incursions of his familiars annoy him; although it annoys him more when they go away. In the midst of this trouble his works are collected and published; and he emerges at once from the obscure shades of Leadenhall Street, into the full blaze of public notice. He wakes from dullness and discontent, and "finds himself famous."

CHAPTER V.

MY RECOLLECTIONS—RUSSELL STREET—PERSONAL APPEARANCE —MANNER—TENDENCY OF MIND—PREJUDICES—ALLEGED EXCESSES—MODE OF LIFE—LOVE OF SMOKING—HIS LODGINGS—HIS SISTER—COSTUME—READING ALOUD—TASTES AND OPINIONS—LONDON—LOVE OF BOOKS—CHARITY —WEDNESDAY PARTIES—HIS COMPANIONS—EPITAPH UPON THEM.

In the year 1817 or 1818 I first became personally acquainted with Charles Lamb. This was about the time of his removal from the Temple. It was in the course of the year 1818 that his works had been first collected and published. They came upon the world by surprise: scarcely anyone, at that time, being aware that a fine genius and humourist existed, within the dull shades of London, whose quality very few of the critics had assayed, and none of them had commended. He was thus thrown (waif-like) amongst

the great body of the people; was at once estimated, and soon rose into renown.

Persons who had been in the habit of traversing Covent Garden at that time, (seven-and-forty years ago), might by extending their walk a few yards into Russell Street, have noted a small spare man, clothed in black, who went out every morning and returned every afternoon, as regularly as the hands of the clock moved towards certain hours. You could not mistake him. He was somewhat stiff in his manner, and almost clerical in dress; which indicated much wear. He had a long, melancholy face, with keen penetrating eyes; and he walked with a short, resolute step, City-wards. He looked no one in the face for more than a moment, yet contrived to see everything as he went on. No one who ever studied the human features could pass him by without recollecting his countenance; it was full of sensibility, and it came upon you like a new thought, which you could not help dwelling upon afterwards; it gave rise to meditation and did you good. This small, half-clerical man, was—Charles Lamb.

I had known him for a short time previously to 1818; having been introduced to him at Mr. Leigh Hunt's house, where I enjoyed his company once or twice over agreeable suppers; but I knew him slightly only, and did not see much of him until he and his sister went to occupy the lodgings in Russell Street, where he invited me to come and see him. They lived in the corner house adjoining Bow Street. This house belonged, at that time, to an ironmonger (or brazier), and was comfortable and clean,—and a little noisy. Charles Lamb was about forty years of age when I first saw him; and I knew him intimately for the greater part of twenty years. Small and spare in person, and with small legs, ("immaterial legs," Hood called them), he had a dark complexion, dark, curling hair, almost black, and a grave look, lightening up occasionally, and capable of sudden merriment. His laugh was seldom excited by jokes merely ludicrous; it was never spiteful; and his quiet smile was sometimes inexpressibly sweet: perhaps it had a touch of sadness in it. His mouth was well-shaped;

his lip tremulous with expression; his brown eyes were quick, restless, and glittering: and he had a grand head, full of thought. Leigh Hunt said that "he had a head worthy of Aristotle." Hazlitt calls it "a fine Titian head, full of dumb eloquence." I knew that, before he had attained the age of twenty years, he had to make his way in the world; and that his lines had not been cast in pleasant places. I had heard, indeed, that his family had at one time consisted of a father and mother and an insane sister; all helpless and poor, and all huddled together in a small lodging, scarcely large enough to admit of their moving about without restraint. It is difficult to imagine a more disheartening youth. Nevertheless, out of this desert, in which no hope was visible, he rose up eventually a cheerful man, (cheerful when his days were not clouded by his sister's illness); a charming companion, full of pleasant and gentle fancies, and the finest humourist of his age.

Although sometimes strange in manner, he was thoroughly unaffected; in serious matters thoroughly sincere. He was, indeed (as he

confesses) terribly shy; diffident, not awkward in manner; with occasionally nervous twitching motions that betrayed this infirmity. He dreaded the criticisms of servants far more than the observations of their masters. To undergo the scrutiny of the first, as he said to me, when we were going to breakfast with Mr. Rogers one morning, was "terrible." His speech was brief and pithy; not too often humourous; never sententious nor didactic. Although he sometimes talked whilst walking up and down the room, (at which time he seldom looked at the person with whom he was talking), he very often spoke as if impelled by the necessity of speaking—suddenly, precipitately. If he could have spoken very easily he might possibly have uttered long sentences, expositions, or orations; such as some of his friends indulged in, to the utter confusion of their hearers.

But he knew the value of silence; and he knew that even truth may be damaged by too many words. When he did speak his words had a flavour in them beyond any that I have heard elsewhere. His conversation dwelt upon persons

or things within his own recollection, or it opened (with a startling doubt, or a question, or a piece of quaint humour) the great circle of thought.

In temper he was quick, but easily appeased. He never affected that exemption from sensibility, which has sometimes been mistaken for philosophy; and has conferred reputation upon little men. In a word, he exhibited his emotions in a fine, simple, natural manner. Contrary to the usual habits of wits, no retort or reply by Lamb, however smart in character, ever gave pain. It is clear that ill-nature is not wit; and that there may be sparkling flowers which are not surrounded by thorns. Lamb's dissent was very intelligible, but never superfluously demonstrative: often, indeed, expressed by his countenance only: sometimes merely by silence.

He was more pleasant to some persons (more pleasant, I confess, to *me*) for the few faults or weaknesses that he had. He did not daunt us, nor throw us to a distance, by his formidable virtues. We sympathized with him; and this sympathy, which is an union between two similitudes, does not

exist between perfect and imperfect natures. Like all of us, he had a few prejudices: he did not like Frenchmen; he shrunk from Scotchmen (excepting, however, Burns); he disliked bankrupts; he hated close bargainers. For the Jewish nation he entertained a mysterious awe: the Jewesses he admired, with trembling; "Jael had those full, dark, inscrutable eyes," he says. Of Braham's triumphant singing he repeatedly spoke; there had been nothing like it in his recollection: he considered him equal to Mrs. Siddons. In his letters he characterises him as "a mixture of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel." He liked chimney-sweepers—the young ones—the "innocent blacknesses;" and with beggars he had a strong sympathy. He always spoke tenderly of them, and has written upon them an essay full of beauty. Do not be frightened (he says) at the hard words, imposture, &c. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: some have unawares entertained angels."

Much injustice has been done to Lamb, by accusing him of excess in drinking. The truth is, that a small quantity of any strong liquid

(wine, &c.) disturbed his speech, which at best was but an eloquent stammer. The distresses of his early life made him ready to resort to any remedy which brought forgetfulness; and he himself, frail in body and excitable, was very speedily affected. During all my intimacy with him I never knew him drink immoderately; except once, when having been prevailed upon to abstain altogether from wine and spirits, he resented the vow thus forced upon him, by imbibing an extraordinary quantity of the "spurious" liquid. When he says, "The waters have gone over me," he speaks in metaphor; not historically. He was never vanquished by water, and seldom by wine. His energy, or mental power, was indeed subject to fluctuation; no excessive merriment, perhaps, but much depression. "My waking life," he writes, "has much of the confusion, the trouble, and obscure perplexity of an ill dream. In the day time I stumble upon dark mountains."

Lamb's mode of life was temperate: his dinner consisting of meat, with vegetables and bread only. "We have a sure hot joint on Sundays," he writes,

"and when had we better?" He appears to have had a relish for game, roast pig, and brawn, &c., roast pig especially, when given to him; but his poverty, first, and afterwards his economical habits, prevented his indulging in such costly luxuries. He was himself a small and delicate eater at all times; and he entertained something like aversion towards great feeders. During a long portion of his life his means were much straitened. The reader may note his want of money in several of his letters. Speaking of a play, he says, "I am quite aground for a plan; and *I must do something for money*."

He was restless and fond of walking. I do not think that he could ride on horseback; but he could walk during all the day. He had, in that manner, traversed the whole of London and its suburbs (especially the northern and north-eastern parts) frequently. "I cannot sit and think," he said. Tired with exercise, he went to bed early, except when friends supped with him; and he always rose early, from necessity, being obliged to attend at his office, in Leadenhall Street, every day, from ten until four o'clock—sometimes later.

It was there that his familiar letters were written. On his return, after a humble meal, he strolled (if it was summer) into the suburbs, or traversed the streets where the old bookshops were to be found. He seldom or never gave dinners. You were admitted at all times to his plain supper, which was sufficiently good when any visitor came; at other times, it was spare. "We have *tried* to eat suppers," Miss Lamb writes to Mrs. Hazlitt, "but we left our appetites behind us; and the dry loaf, which offended you, now comes in at night unaccompanied." You were sure of a welcome at his house: sure of easy unfettered talk. After supper you might smoke a pipe with your host, or gossip (upon any subject) with him or his sensible sister. Perhaps the pipe was the only thing in which Lamb really exceeded. He was fond of it from the very early years, when he was accustomed to smoke "Orinooko" at the "Salutation and Cat," with Coleridge, in 1796. He attempted on several occasions to give it up, but his struggles were overcome by counter influences. "Tobacco," he says, "stood in its own light." At last, in 1805,

he was able to conquer and abandon it,—for a time. His success, like desertion from a friend, caused some remorse and a great deal of regret. In writing to Coleridge, about his house, which was "smoky," he enquires, "Have you cured it? It is hard to cure anything of smoking." Apart from the mere pleasure of smoking, the narcotic soothed his nerves and controlled those perpetual apprehensions which his sister's frequent illnesses excited. Of Mary Lamb, Hazlitt has said (somewhere) that she was the most rational and wisest woman whom he had ever known.—Lamb and his sister had an open party once a week, every Wednesday evening, when his friends generally went to visit him, without any special invitation. He invited you suddenly, not pressingly; but with such heartiness that you at once agreed to come. There was usually a game at whist on these evenings, in which the stakes were very moderate, indeed almost nominal.

—When my thoughts turn backward, as they sometimes do, to these past days, I see my dear old friend again,—"in my mind's eye, Horatio;" with

his outstretched hand, and his grave sweet smile of welcome. It was always in a room of moderate size, comfortably, but plainly furnished, that he lived. An old mahogany table was opened out in the middle of the room, round which, and near the walls, were old high backed chairs (such as our grandfathers used), and a long plain bookcase completely filled with old books. These were his "ragged veterans." In one of his letters he says, "My rooms are luxurious, one for prints and one for books; a summer and winter parlour." They, however, were not otherwise decorated. I do not remember ever to have seen a flower or an image in them. He had not been educated into expensive tastes. His extravagances were confined to books. These were all chosen by himself, all old, and all in "admired disorder;" yet he could lay his hand on any volume in a moment. "You never saw," he writes, "a bookcase in more true harmony with the contents than what I have nailed up in my room. Though new it has more aptitude for growing old than you shall often see; as one sometimes gets a friend in the

middle of life who becomes an old friend in a short time."

Here Charles Lamb sate, when at home, always near the table. At the opposite side was his sister, engaged in some domestic work, knitting or sewing, or poring over a modern novel. "Bridget in some things is behind her years." In fact, although she was ten years older than her brother, she had more sympathy with modern books and with youthful fancies than he had. She wore a neat cap, of the fashion of her youth; an old-fashioned dress. Her face was pale and somewhat square; but very placid; with gray intelligent eyes. She was very mild in her manner to strangers; and to her brother gentle and tender, always. She had often an upward look of peculiar meaning, when directed towards him; as though to give him assurance that all was then well with her. His affection for her was somewhat less on the surface; but always present. There was great gratitude intermingled with it. "In the days of weakling infancy," he writes, "I was her tender charge, as I have been her care in foolish manhood since." Then he adds, pathetically,

J. A. Vinter, lith. Day & Son, Limited, Lith.

MARY LAMB.

SISTER OF CHARLES LAMB.

From a portrait by F. S. Cary.

"I wish I could throw into a heap the remainder of our joint existences, that we might share them in equal division."

Lamb himself was always dressed in black. "I take it," he says, "to be the proper costume of an author." When this was once objected to, at a wedding, he pleaded the raven's apology in the fable, that "he had no other." His clothes were entirely black; and he wore long black gaiters, up to the knees. His head was bent a little forward, like one who had been reading; and, if not standing or walking, he generally had in his hand an old book, a pinch of snuff, or, later in the evening, a pipe. He stammered a little, pleasantly, just enough to prevent his making speeches; just enough to make you listen eagerly for his words, always full of meaning, or charged with a jest; or referring (but this was rare,) to some line or passage from one of the old Elizabethan writers, which was always ushered in with a smile of tender reverence. When he read aloud it was with a slight tone, which I used to think he had caught from Coleridge; Coleridge's recitation, however, rising to a chant. Lamb's

reading was not generally in books of verse, but in the old lay writers, whose tendency was towards religious thoughts. He liked however religious verse: "I can read," he writes to Bernard Barton, "the homely old version of the Psalms in our prayer-books, for an hour or two, without sense of weariness." He avoided manuscripts as much as practicable: "all things read *raw* to me in manuscript." Lamb wrote much, including many letters; but his hands were wanting in pliancy ("inveterate clumsiness" are his words), and his handwriting was therefore never good. It was neither text nor running hand, and the letters did not indicate any fluency; it was not the handwriting of an old man nor of a young man; yet it had a very peculiar character; stiff, resolute, distinct; quite unlike all others that I have seen, and easily distinguishable amongst a thousand.

No one has described Lamb's manner or merits so well as Hazlitt: "He always made the best pun and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine

piquant, deep, eloquent things, in half a dozen sentences, as he does. His jests scald like tears; and he probes a question with a play upon words. There was no fuss or cant about him. He has furnished many a text for Coleridge to preach upon." (*I. Plain Speaker.*) Charles was frequently merry; but ever, at the back of his merriment, there reposed a grave depth, in which rich colours and tender lights were inlaid. For his jests sprang from his sensibility; which was as open to pleasure as to pain. This sensibility, if it somewhat impaired his vigour, led him into curious and delicate fancies, and taught him a liking for things of the highest relish, which a mere robust jester never tastes.

Large sounding words, unless embodying great thoughts (as in the case of Lear), he did not treasure up or repeat. He was an admirer of what was high and good, of what was delicate (especially); but he delighted most to saunter along the humbler regions, where kindness of heart and geniality of humour made the way pleasant. His intellect was very quick, piercing into the recondite meaning of things in a moment.

His own sentences were compressed and full of meaning; his opinions independent and decisive; no qualifying or doubting. His descriptions were not highly coloured; but, as it were, sharply cut, like a piece of marble, rather than like a picture. He liked and encouraged friendly discussion; but he hated contentious argument, which leads to quarrel rather than to truth.

There was an utter want of parade in everything he said and did, in everything about him and his home. The only ornaments on his walls were a few engravings in black frames: one after Leonardo da Vinci; one after Titian; and four, I think, by Hogarth, about whom he has written so well. Images of quaint beauty, and all gentle, simple things (things without pretension) pleased him to the fullest extent; perhaps a little beyond their strict merit. I have heard him express admiration for Leonardo da Vinci that he did not accord to Raffaelle. Raffaelle was too ostentatious of meaning; his merits were too obvious,—too much thrust upon the understanding; not retired nor involved, so as to need discovery or solution. He preferred

even Titian (whose meaning is generally obvious enough) to Raffaelle; but Leonardo was above both. Without doubt, Lamb's taste on several matters was peculiar; for instance, there were a few obsolete words, such as *arride*, *agnize*, *burgeon*, &c., which he fancied, and chose to rescue from oblivion. Then he did not care for music. I never heard a song in his house, nor any conversation on the subject of melody or harmony. "I have no ear," he says; yet the sentiment, apart from the science of music, gave him great pleasure. He reverenced the fine organ playing of Mr. Novello, and admired the soaring singing of his daughter,—"the tuneful daughter of a tuneful sire;" but he resented the misapplication of the theatres to sacred music. He thought this a profanation of the good old original secular purposes of a playhouse.

As a comprehension of all delights he loved London; with its bustle and its living throngs of men and women; its shops, its turns and windings; the cries and noises of trade and life; beyond all other things. He liked also old buildings and out of the way places; Colleges; solemn churchyards, round

which the murmuring thousands floated unheeding. In particular he was fond of visiting, in his short vacations, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Although (he writes) "Mine have been anything but studious hours," he professes to have received great solace from those "repositories of 'mouldering' learning." "What a place to be in is an old library!" he exclaims, "where the souls of the old writers seem reposing; as in some dormitory or middle state." The odour of the "moth-scented" coverings of the old books is "as fragrant as the blooms of the tree of knowledge which grew in the happy orchard." An ancient manor-house, that Vanbrugh might have built, dwelt like a picture in his memory. "Nothing fills a child's mind like an old mansion," he says. Yet he could feel unaffectedly the simplicity and beauty of a country life. The heartiness of country people went to his heart direct, and remained there for ever. The Fields and the Gladmans, with their homely dwellings and hospitality, drew him to them like magnets. There was nothing too fine or too lofty in these friends for his tastes or his affection; they

did not "affront him with their light." His fancy always stooped to moralize; he hated the stilted attitudes and pretensions of poetasters and self-glorifying artists.—He never spoke disparagingly of any person, nor overpraised any one. When it was proposed to erect a statue of Clarkson, during his life; he objected to it: "We should be modest," he says, "for a modest man." He was himself eminently modest; he never put himself forward: he was always sought. He had much to say on many subjects, and he was repeatedly pressed to say this, before he consented to do so. He was almost teased into writing the Elia Essays. These and all his other writings are brief and to the point. He did not exhale in words. It was said that Coleridge's talk was worth so many guineas a sheet. Charles Lamb talked but sparingly. He put forth only so much as had complete flavour. I know that high pay and frequent importunity failed to induce him to squander his strength in careless essays: he waited until he could give them their full share of meaning and humour.

When I speak of his extreme liking for London,

it must not be supposed that he was insensible to great scenery. After his only visit to the Lake country, and beholding Skiddaw, he writes back to his host, "Oh! its fine black head, and the bleak air at the top of it, with a prospect of mountains all about, making you giddy. It was a day that will stand out like a mountain in my life;" adding, however, "Fleet Street and the Strand are better places to live in, for good and all. I could not *live* in Skiddaw. I could spend there two or three years; but I must have a prospect of seeing Fleet Street at the end of that time, or I should mope and pine away." He loved even its smoke, and asserted that it suited his vision. A short time previously he had, in a touching letter to Wordsworth (1801), enumerated the objects that he liked so much in London. "These things," he writes, "work themselves into my mind: the rooms where I was born; a bookcase that has followed me about like a faithful dog, (only exceeding him in knowledge) wherever I have moved; old chairs; old tables; squares where I have sunned myself; my old school: these are my mistresses. Have I not

enough, without your mountains? I do not envy you; I should pity you, did I not know that the mind will make friends with anything."

Besides his native London, "the centre of busy interests," he had great liking for unpretending men, who would come and gossip with him in a friendly companionable way, or who liked to talk about old authors or old books. In his love of books he was very catholic. "Shaftesbury is not too genteel, nor Jonathan Wild too low. But for books which are no books," such as "scientific treatises, and the histories of Hume, Smollett, and Gibbon," &c., he confesses that he becomes splenetic when he sees them perched up on shelves, "like false saints, who have usurped the true shrines" of the legitimate occupants. He loved old books and authors, indeed, beyond most other things. He used to say (with Shakespeare) "The Heavens themselves are old." He would rather have acquired an ancient forgotten volume than a modern one, at an equal price; the very circumstance of its having been neglected and cast disdainfully into the refuse basket of a bookstall gave

it value in his eyes. He bought it, and rejoiced in being able thus to remedy the injustice of fortune. He liked best those who had not thriven with posterity: his reverence for Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, can only be explained in this way. It must not be forgotten that his pity or generosity towards neglected authors extended also to all whom the goddess of Good Fortune had slighted. In this list were included all who had suffered in purse or in repute. He was ready to defend man or beast, whenever unjustly attacked. I remember that, at one of the monthly magazine dinners, when John Wilkes was too roughly handled, Lamb quoted the story (not generally known) of his replying, when the blackbirds were reported to have stolen all his cherries, "Poor birds, they are welcome." He said that those impulsive words showed the inner nature of the man more truly than all his political speeches. Lamb's charity extended to all things. I never heard him speak spitefully of any author. He thought that every one should have a clear stage, unobstructed. His heart, young at all times, never grew hard or

callous during life. There was always in it a tender spot, which Time was unable to touch. He gave away *greatly*, when the amount of his means are taken into consideration; he gave away money,—even annuities, I believe, to old impoverished friends whose wants were known to him. I remember that once, when we were sauntering together on Pentonville Hill, and he noticed great depression in me, which he attributed to want of money, he said, suddenly, in his stammering way, "My dear boy, I—I have a quantity of useless things. I have now—in my desk, a—a hundred pounds—that I don't—don't *know* what to do with. Take it." I was much touched: but I assured him that my depression did not arise from want of money. He was very home-loving; he loved London as the best of places; he loved his home as the dearest spot in London: it was the inmost heart of the sanctuary. Whilst at home he had no curiosity for what passed beyond his own territory. His eyes were never truant; no one ever saw him peering out of window, examining the crowds flowing by; no one ever surprised

him gazing on vacancy. "I lose myself," he says, "in other men's minds. When I am not walking I am reading; I cannot sit and think; books think for me." If it was not the time for his pipe, it was always the time for an old play, or for a talk with friends. In the midst of this society his own mind grew green again and blossomed; or, as he would have said, "burgeoned."

In the foregoing desultory account of Charles Lamb I have, without doubt, set forth many things that are frequently held as trivial. Nothing, however, seems to me unimportant which serves in any way to illustrate a character. The floating straws, it is said, show from what quarter the wind is blowing. So, the arching or knitting of the brow is sometimes sufficient to indicate wonder or pride, anger or contempt. On the stage, indeed, it is often the sole means of expressing the fluctuation of the passions. I myself have heard of a "Pooh!" which interrupted a long intimacy, when the pander was administering sweet words in too liberal a measure.

As with Lamb so with his companions. Each

was notable for some individual mark or character. His own words will best describe them:—"Not many persons of science, and few professed *literati*, were of his councils. They were for the most part persons of an uncertain fortune. His intimados were, to confess a truth, in the world's eye, a ragged regiment; he found them floating on the surface of society, and the colour or something else in the weed pleased him. The burrs stuck to him; but they were good and loving burrs, for all that."

None of Lamb's intimates were persons of title or fashion, or of any political importance. They were reading men, or authors, or old friends who had no name or pretensions. The only tie that held these last and Lamb together was a long-standing mutual friendship; a sufficient link. None of them ever forsook him; they loved him, and in return he had a strong regard for them. His affections, indeed, were concentrated on few persons; not widened (weakened) by too general a philanthropy. When you went to Lamb's rooms on the Wednesday evenings, (his "At

Home,") you generally found the card table spread out, Lamb himself one of the players. On the corner of the table was a snuff-box; and the game was enlivened by sundry brief ejaculations and pungent questions, which kept alive the wits of the party present. It was not "silent whist!" I do not remember whether, in common with Sarah Battle, Lamb had a weakness in favour of "Hearts." I suppose that it was at one of these meetings that he made that shrewd remark which has since escaped into notoriety: "Martin" (observed he), "if dirt were trumps, what a hand you would hold." It is not known what influence Martin's trumps had on the rubber then in progress.—When the conversation became general, Lamb's part in it was very effective. His short clear sentences always produced effect. He never joined in talk unless he understood the subject; then, if the matter in question interested him, he was not slow in showing his earnestness; but I never heard him argue or talk for argument's sake. If he was indifferent to the question, he was silent.

The supper of cold meat, on these occasions,

was always on the side table; not very formal, as may be imagined; and every one might rise, when it suited him, and cut a slice or take a glass of porter, without reflecting on the abstinence of the rest of the company. Lamb would, perhaps, call out and bid the hungry guest help himself without ceremony. We learn (from Hazlitt) that Martin Burney's eulogies on books were sometimes intermingled with expressions of his satisfaction with the veal pie which employed him at the sideboard. After the game was won (and lost) the ring of the cheerful glasses announced that punch or brandy and water had become the order of the night.

It was curious to observe the gradations in Lamb's manner to his various guests; although it was courteous to all. With Hazlitt he talked at though they met the subject in discussion on equal terms; with Leigh Hunt he exchanged repartees; to Wordsworth he was almost respectful; with Coleridge he was sometimes jocose, sometimes deferring; with Martin Burney fraternally familiar; with Manning affectionate; with Godwin merely

courteous; or if friendly, then in a minor degree. The man whom I found at Lamb's house more frequently than any other person was Martin Burney. He is now scarcely known; yet Lamb dedicated his prose works to him, in 1818, and there described him as "no common judge of books and men;" and Southey, corresponding with Rickman, when his "Joan of Arc" was being reprinted, says, "The best omen I have heard of its well-doing is that Martin Burney likes it." Lamb was very much attached to Martin, who was a sincere and able man, although with a very unprepossessing physiognomy. His face was warped by paralysis, which affected one eye and one side of his mouth. He was plain and unaffected in manner, very diffident and retiring; yet pronouncing his opinions, when asked to do so, without apology or hesitation. He was a barrister; and travelled the western circuit at the same time as Sir Thomas Wilde (afterwards Lord Truro), whose briefs he used to read before the other considered them; marking out the principal facts and points for attention. Martin Burney

had excellent taste in books; eschewed the showy and artificial, and looked into the sterling qualities of writing. He frequently accompanied Lamb in his visits to friends, and although very familiar with Charles, he always spoke of him, with respect, as *Mr.* Lamb. "He is on the top scale of my friendship ladder," Lamb says, "on which an angel or two is still climbing, and some, alas! descending." The last time I saw Burney was at the corner of a street in London, when he was overflowing on the subject of Raffaelle and Hogarth. After a great and prolonged struggle, he said, he had arrived at the conclusion that Raffaelle was the greater man of the two.

Notwithstanding Lamb's somewhat humble description of his friends and familiars, some of them were men well known in literature. Amongst others, I met there Messrs. Coleridge, Manning, Hazlitt, Haydon, Wordsworth, Barron Field, Leigh Hunt, Clarkson, Sheridan Knowles, Talfourd, Kenney, Godwin, the Burneys, Payne Collier, and others whose names I need not chronicle. I met there, also, on one or two

occasions, Liston, and Miss Kelly, and, I believe, Rickman. Politics were rarely discussed amongst them. Anecdotes, characteristic, showing the strong and weak points of human nature, were frequent enough. But politics (especially party politics) were seldom admitted. Lamb disliked them as a theme for evening talk; he perhaps did not understand the subject scientifically. And when Hazlitt's impetuosity drove him, as it sometimes did, into fierce expressions on public affairs, these were usually received in silence; and the matter thus raised up for assent or controversy was allowed to drop.

—Lamb's old associates are now dead. "They that lived so long," as he says, "and flourished so steadily, are all crumbled away." The beauty of these evenings was that every one was placed upon an easy level. No one out-topped the others. No one—not even Coleridge—was permitted to out-talk the rest. No one was allowed to hector another, or to bring his own grievances too prominently forward; so as to disturb the harmony of the night. Every one had a right to speak, and to be heard; and no one was ever trodden

or clamoured down (as in some large assemblies), until he had proved that he was not entitled to a hearing, or until he had abused his privilege. I never, in all my life, heard so much unpretending good sense talked, as at Charles Lamb's social parties. Often, a piece of sparkling humour was shot out that illuminated the whole evening. Sometimes there was a flight of high and earnest talk, that took one half way toward the stars.

It seems great matter for regret that the thoughts of men like Lamb's associates should have passed away altogether; for scarcely any of them, save Wordsworth and Coleridge, are now distinctly remembered; and it is, perhaps, not impossible to foretell the duration of *their* fame. All have answered their purpose, I suppose. Each has had his turn, and has given place to a younger thinker, as the father is replaced by the son. Thus Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne, and Webster, and the old Dramatists, have travelled out of sight; and their thoughts are reproduced by modern writers; the originators of those thoughts often remaining unknown. Perhaps *One*, out of many thousand

authors, survives into an immortality. The manner and the taste change. The armour and falchion of old give place to the new weapons of modern warfare; less weighty, but perhaps as trenchant. We praise the old authors, but we do not read them. The Soul of Antiquity seems to survive only in its proverbs; which contain the very essence of wisdom.

CHAPTER VI.

LONDON MAGAZINE—CONTRIBUTORS—TRANSFER OF MAGAZINE —MONTHLY DINNERS AND VISITORS—COLEBROOK COTTAGE— LAMB'S WALKS—ESSAYS OF ELIA: THEIR EXCELLENCE AND CHARACTER—ENLARGED ACQUAINTANCE—VISIT TO PARIS— MISS ISOLA — QUARREL WITH SOUTHEY — LEAVES INDIA HOUSE—LEISURE—AMICUS REDIVIVUS—EDWARD IRVING.

THE "London Magazine" was established in January, 1820; the publishers being Messrs. Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, and its editor being Mr. John Scott, who had formerly edited "The Champion" newspaper, and whose profession was exclusively that of a man of letters. At this distance of time, it is impossible to specify the authors of all the various papers which gave a tone to the magazine; but as this publication forms, in fact, the great foundation of Lamb's fame, I think it well to enter somewhat minutely into its constitution and character.

Mr. John Scott was the writer of the several articles entitled "The Living Authors;" of a good

many of the earlier criticisms; of some of the papers on politics; and of some which may be termed "Controversial." The essays on Sir Walter Scott, Wordsworth, Godwin, and Lord Byron, are from his hand. He contributed also the critical papers, on the writings of Keats, Shelley, Leigh Hunt, and Hazlitt.

Mr. Hazlitt wrote all the articles which appear under the head "Drama;" the twelve essays entitled "Table Talk;" and the papers on Fonthill Abbey, and on the Angerstein pictures, and the Elgin marbles.

Mr. Charles Lamb's papers were the well-known Elia Essays, which first appeared in this magazine. Mr. Elia (whose name he assumed) was, at one time, a clerk in the India House. He died, however, before the Essays were made public, and was ignorant of Lamb's intention to do honor to his name.

Mr. Thomas Carlyle was author of the "Life and Writings of Schiller," in the eighth, ninth, and tenth volumes of the magazine. These papers, although very excellent, appear to be scarcely

prophetic of the great fame which their author was afterwards destined, so justly, to achieve.

Mr. de Quincy's contributions were the "Confessions of an Opium Eater;" also various papers specified as being "by the Opium Eater;" the essay on Jean Paul Richter, and papers translated from the German, or dealing with German literature.

The Reverend Henry Francis Cary (the translator of Dante) wrote the Notices of the Early French poets; the additions to Orford's "Royal and Noble Authors;" and, I believe, the continuations of Johnson's "Lives of the Poets." Of these last, however, I am not certain.

Mr. Allan Cunningham (the Scottish poet) was author of the "Twelve Tales of Lyddal Cross;" of the series of stories or papers styled "Traditional Literature;" and of various other contributions in poetry and prose.

Mr. John Poole contributed the "Beauties of the living Dramatists;" being burlesque imitations of modern writers for the stage; viz. Morton, Dibdin, Reynolds, Moncrieff, &c.

Mr. John Hamilton Reynolds wrote, I believe, in every number of the periodical, after it came into the hands of Taylor and Hessey, who were his friends. All the papers with the name of Henry Herbert affixed were written by him; also the descriptive accounts of the Coronation, Greenwich Hospital, The Cockpit Royal, The Trial of Thurtell, &c.

Mr. Thomas Hood fleshed his maiden sword here; and his first poems of length, "Lycus the Centaur" and "The two Peacocks of Bedfont" may be found in the magazine.

Mr. George Darley (author of "Thomas à Becket," &c.) wrote the several papers entitled "Dramaticles;" some pieces of verse; and the Letters addressed to "The Dramatists of the Day."

Mr. Richard Ayton wrote "The Sea Roamers," the article on "Hunting," and such papers as are distinguished by the signature "R.A."

Mr. Keats (the poet) and *Mr. James Montgomery* contributed verses.

Sir John Bowring (I believe) translated into

English verse the Spanish poetry, and wrote the several papers which appear under the head of "Spanish Romances."

Mr. Henry Southern (editor of "The Retrospective Review") wrote the "Conversations of Lord Byron," and "The Fanariotes of Constantinople," in the tenth volume.

Mr. Walter Savage Landor was author of the Imaginary Conversation, between Southey and Porson, in volume eight.

Mr. Julius (*Archdeacon*) *Hare* reviewed the works of Landor in the tenth volume.

Mr. Elton contributed many translations from Greek and Latin authors; from the minor poems of Homer, from Catullus, Nonnus, Propertius, &c.

Messrs. Hartley Coleridge, John Clare, Cornelius Webb, Bernard Barton, and others sent poems; generally with the indicating name.

I myself was amongst the crowd of contributors; and was author of various pieces, some in verse, and others in prose, now under the protection of that great Power which is called "Oblivion."

Finally, the too celebrated *Thomas Griffiths*

Wainewright contributed various fantasies, on Art and Arts; all or most of which may be recognised by his assumed name of Janus Weathercock.

To show the difficulty of specifying the authorship of all the articles contributed, — even Mr. Hessey (one of the proprietors) was unable to do so; and indeed, shortly before his death, applied to me for information on the subject.

By the aid of the gentlemen who contributed—each his quota—to the "London Magazine," it acquired much reputation, and a very considerable sale. During its career of five years, it had, for a certain style of essay, no superior (scarcely an equal) amongst the periodicals of the day. It was perhaps not so widely popular as works directed to the multitude, instead of to the select few, might have been; for thoughts and words addressed to the cultivated intellect only must always reckon upon limited success. Yet the magazine was successful, to an extent that preserved its proprietors from loss; perhaps not greatly beyond that point. Readers in those years were insignificant in number, compared with readers of the present time; when almost all

men are able to derive benefit from letters, and letters are placed within every one's reach.

On the death of Mr. John Scott, the Magazine, in July, 1821, passed into the hands of Messrs. Taylor and Hessey; the former being the gentleman who discovered the identity of Junius with Sir Philip Francis; the latter being simply very courteous to all, and highly respectable and intelligent.

John Scott was an able literary man. I do not remember much more of him than that he was a shrewd and I believe a conscientious writer; that he had great industry; was, generally, well read, and possessed a very fair amount of critical taste; that, like other persons, he had some prejudices, and that he was sometimes, moreover, a little hasty and irritable. Yet, he agreed well, as far as I know, with the regiment of mercenaries who marched under his flag..

When Taylor and Hessey assumed the management of the "London Magazine" they engaged no editor. They were tolerably liberal paymasters: the remuneration for each page of prose, (not very laborious,) being, if the writer were a person of

repute or ability, one pound; and for each page of verse, two pounds. Charles Lamb received (very fitly) for his brief and charming essays, two or three times the amount of the other writers. When they purchased the Magazine, the proprietors opened a house, in Waterloo Place, for the better circulation of the publication.

It was there that the contributors met once a month, over an excellent dinner, given by the firm; and consulted and talked on literary matters together. These meetings were very social; all the guests coming with a determination to please and to be pleased. I do not know that many important matters were arranged, for the welfare of the magazine, at these dinners; but the hearts of the contributors were opened, and with the expansion of the heart the intellect widened also. If there had been any shades of jealousy amongst them, they faded away before the light of the friendly carousal; if there was any envy, it died. All the fences and restraints of authorship were cast off, and the natural human being was disclosed.

Amongst others, Charles Lamb came to most

of these dinners, always dressed in black (his old snuff coloured suit having been dismissed for years); always kind and genial; conversational, not talkative, but quick in reply; eating little, and drinking moderately with the rest. Allan Cunningham, a stalwart man, was generally there; very Scotch in aspect, but ready to do a good turn to any one. His talk was not too abundant, although he was a voluminous writer in prose. His songs, not unworthy of being compared with even those of Burns, are (as everybody knows) excellent. His face shone at these festivities. Reynolds came always. His good temper and vivacity were like condiments at the feast. There also came, once or twice, the Rev. H. F. Cary, the quiet gentleness of whose face almost interfered with its real intelligence. Yet he spoke well and with readiness, on any subject that he chose to discuss. He was very intimate with Lamb, who latterly often dined with him, and was always punctual: "By Cot's plessing we will not be absent at the Grace," (he writes in 1834). Lamb's taste was very homely: he liked tripe and cow-heel, and once when he was

suggesting a particular dish to his friend, he wrote "we were talking of roast shoulder of mutton and onion sauce; but I scorn to prescribe hospitalities." Charles had great regard for Mr. Cary; and in his last letter (written on his death bed) he enquired for a book, which he was very uneasy about, and which he thought he had left at Mrs. Dyer's; "It is Mr. Cary's book (he says), and I would not lose it for the world." Cary was entirely without vanity; and he, who had traversed the ghastly regions of the Inferno, interchanged little courtesies on equal terms with workers who had never travelled beyond the pages of "The London Magazine." No one (it is said) who has performed anything great ever looks big upon it. Thomas Hood was there, almost silent, except when he shot out some irresistible pun, and disturbed the gravity of the company. Hood's labours were poetic but his sports were passerine. It is remarkable that he, who was capable of jesting even on his own prejudices and predilections, should not (like Catullus) have brought down the "Sparrow," and inclosed him in an ode. Lamb admired and was very familiar

with him. "What a fertile genius he is" (Charles Lamb writes to Bernard Barton), "and quiet withal." He then expatiates particularly on Hood's sketch of "Very Deaf indeed!" wherein a footpad has stopped an old gentleman, but cannot make him understand what he wants, although the fellow is firing a pistol into his ear trumpet: "you'd like him very much" he adds. Although Lamb liked him very much, he was a little annoyed once by Hood writing a comical essay in imitation of (and so much like) one of his own, that people generally thought that Elia had awakened in an unruly mood. Hazlitt attended once or twice; but he was a rather silent guest, rising into emphatic talk only when some political discussion (very rare) stimulated him. Mr. De Quincy appeared at only one of these dinners. The expression of his face was intelligent, but cramped and somewhat peevish. He was self-involved, and did not add to the cheerfulness of the meeting. I have consulted this gentleman's three essays, of which Charles Lamb is professedly the subject; but I cannot derive from them anything illustrative of

my friend Lamb's character. I have been mainly struck therein by De Quincy's attacks on Hazlitt; to whom the essays had no relation. I am aware that the two authors (Hazlitt and De Quincy) had a quarrel in 1823; Hazlitt having claimed certain theories or reasonings which the other had propounded as his own. In reply to Mr. De Quincy's claims to have had a familiar acquaintance with Charles Lamb (in 1821 and 1823), I have to observe that during these years (when I was almost continually with him) I never saw Mr. De Quincy at his house, and never heard Lamb speak of him or refer to his writings on any occasion. His visits Lamb were surely very rare.

John Clare, a peasant from Northamptonshire, and a better poet than Bloomfield, was one of the visitors. He was thoroughly rustic; dressed in conspicuously country fashion, and was as simple as a daisy. His delight at the wonders of London formed the staple of his talk. This was often stimulated into extravagance by the facetious fictions of Reynolds. Poor fellow, he died insane.

About this time Lamb determined to leave

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CHARLES LAMB

(From a portrait by F. S. Cary)

London; and in 1823 he moved into Colebrook Cottage, Islington, a small detached white house of six rooms. "The New River, rather elderly by this time," (he says,) "runs, if a moderate walking pace can be so termed, close to the foot of the house; behind, is a spacious garden, &c., and the cheerful dining-room is studded all over and rough with old books: I feel like a great lord; never having had a house before."

From this place (which a friend of his christened "petty Venice") he used often to walk into London, to breakfast or dine with an acquaintance. For walking was always grateful to him. When confined to his room in the India House, he counted it amongst his principal recreations, and even now, with the whole world of leisure before him, it ranked amongst his daily enjoyments. By himself, or with an acquaintance, and subsequently with Hood's dog Dash, (whose name should have been Rover,) he wandered over all the roads and bypaths of the adjoining country. He was a peripatetic, in every way, beyond the followers of Aristotle. Walking occupied his energies; and when he

returned home, he (like Sarah Battle,) "unbent his mind over a book." "I cannot sit and think" is his phrase. If he now and then stopped for a minute at a rustic public house, tired with the excursive caprices of Dash—beguiled perhaps by the simple attractions of a village sign—I hold him excusable for the glass of porter which sometimes invigorated him in his fatigue.

In the course of these walks he traversed all the green regions which lie on the north and north-east of the metropolis. In London he loved to frequent those streets where the old bookshops were, Wardour Street, Princes Street, Seven Dials (where the shop has been long closed): he loved also Gray's Inn, in the garden of which he met Dodd, just before his death ("with his buffoon mask taken off"); and the Temple, into which you pass from the noise and crowd of Fleet Street,—into the quiet and "ample squares and green recesses," where the old Dial, "the garden god of Christian gardens," then told of Time, and where the still living fountain sends up its song into the listening air.

Of the Essays of "Elia,"* written originally for the London Magazine, I feel it difficult to speak. They are the best amongst the good: his best. I see that they are genial, delicate, terse, full of thought and full of humour; that they are delightfully personal; and when he speaks of himself you cannot hear too much: that they are not imitations, but adoptions. We encounter his likings and fears, his fancies (his nature) in all. The words have an import never known before: the syllables have expanded their meaning, like opened flowers; the goodness of others is heightened by his own tenderness; and what is in nature hard and bad is qualified (qualified, not concealed) by the tender light of pity, which always intermingles with his own vision. Gravity and laughter, fact and fiction are heaped together, leavened in each case by charity and toleration; and all are marked by a wise humanity. Lamb's humour, I imagine, often reflected (sometimes, I

* The first Essays of Elia were published by Taylor and Hessey under the title "Elia," in 1823. The second Essays were, together with the "Popular Fallacies," collected and published under the title of "The Last Essays of Elia," by Moxon, in 1833.

hope, relieved) the load of pain that always weighed on his own heart.

The first of the Essays ("The South Sea House") appeared in the month of August, 1820: the last ("Captain Jackson") in November, 1824. Lamb's literary prosperity during this period was at the highest; yet he was always loth to show himself too much before the world. After the first series of essays had been published (for they are divided into two parts) he feigned that he was dead, and caused the second series to be printed as by "a friend of the late Elia." These were written somewhat reluctantly. His words are, "To say the truth, it is time he [Elia] were gone. The humour of the thing, if ever there were much humour in it, was pretty well exhausted; and a two years-and-a-half existence has been a tolerable duration for a phantom." It is thus modestly that he speaks of essays which have delighted all cultivated readers.

I want a phrase to express the combination of qualities which constitutes Lamb's excellence in letters. In the absence of this, I must content

myself with referring to some of the papers which live most distinctly in my recollection. I will not transcribe any part of his eulogy on Hogarth; nor of his fine survey of "Lear," that grandest of all tragedies. They are well known to students of books. I turn for a moment to the Elia Essays only. In mere variety of subject (extent in a small space) they surpass almost all other essays. They are full of a witty melancholy. Many of them may be termed autobiographical, which trebles their interest with most readers.

Let me recollect:—How he mourns over the ruins of Blakesmoor (once his home on holidays), "reduced to an antiquity." How he stalks, ghost-like, through the desolate rooms of the South Sea House; or treads the avenues of the Temple; (where the benchers, "supposed to have been children once") are pacing the stony terraces. Then there is the inimitable Sarah Battle (unconquered even by Chance), arming herself for the war of whist; and the young Africans, "preaching from their chimney-pulpits lessons of patience to mankind." If your appetite is keen, by all means

visit Bobo, who invented roast pig: if gay, and disposed to saunter through the pleasant lanes of Hertfordshire, go to Mackery End, where the Gladmans and Brutons will bid you welcome: if grave, let your eyes repose on the face of dear old Bridget Elia, "in a season of distress the truest comforter." Should you wish to enlarge your humanity, place a few coins (maravedis) in the palm of one of the beggars (the "blind Tobits") of London, and try to believe his tales, histories or fables, as though they were the veritable stories (told by night) on the banks of the famous Tigris. Do not despise the poorest of the poor—even the writer of valentines; "All valentines are not foolish," as you may read in Elia's words; and "All fools' day" may cheer you, as the fool in "Lear" may make you wise and tolerant.

I could go on for many pages—to the poor relations, and the old books, and the old actors; to Dodd, who "dying put on the weeds of Dominic;" and to Mrs. Jordan and Dickey Suet (both whom I well remember); to Elliston, always on the stage; to Munden, with features

ever changing; and to Liston with only one face; "But what a face!" I forbear. I pass also over Comberbatch (Coleridge), borrower of books, and Captain Jackson, and Barbara S. (Miss Kelly); and go to the rest of my little history.

The "Popular Fallacies," which in course of time followed, and were eventually added to the second series and re-published, are in manner essays also on a small scale, brief and dealing with abstract subjects more than the "Elia." It may be interesting to know that Lamb's two favourites were "That home is home, though it is never so homely," and "That we should rise with the lark." In the first of these he enters into all the discomforts and terrible distractions of a poor man's home; in the second he descants on the luxuries of bed, and the nutritious value of dreams: "The busy part of mankind," he says, "are content to swallow their sleep by wholesale: we choose to linger in bed and digest our dreams." The last "Fallacy" is remarkable for a sentence which seems to refer to Alice W.:— "We were never much in the world," he says; "disappointment early struck a dark veil between

us and its dazzling illusions:" he then concludes with "We once thought life to be something, but it has unaccountably fallen from us before its time. The sun has no purposes of ours to light us to. Why should we get up?"

It will be observed by the sagacious student of the entire Essays, that however quaint or familiar, or (rarely, however) sprinkled with classical allusions, they are never vulgar, nor commonplace, nor pedantic. They are "natural with a self-pleasing quaintness." The phrases are not affected; but are derived from our ancestors, now gone to another country; they are brought back from the land of shadows and made denizens of England, in modern times. Lamb's studies were the lives and characters of men; his humours and tragic meditations were generally dug out of his own heart; there are in them earnestness and pity and generosity and truth; and there is not a mean or base thought to be found throughout all.

In reading over these old essays, some of them affect me with a grave pleasure, amounting to pain. I seem to import into them the very feeling with

which he wrote them; his looks and movements are transfigured, and communicated to me by the poor art of the printer. His voice, so sincere and earnest, rings in my ear again. He was no Feign-well: apart from his joke, never was a man so real, and free from pretence. No one as I believe will ever taste the flavour of certain writers as he has done. He was the last true lover of Antiquity. Although he admitted a few of the beauties of modern times, yet in his stronger love he soared backwards to old acclivities, and loved to rest there. His essays, like his sonnets, are (as I have said) reflections of his own feelings. And so, I think, should essays generally be. A history or sketch of science,—or a logical effort, may help the reader some way up the ladder of learning; but they do not link themselves with his affections. I myself prefer the affections to the sciences. The story of the heart is the deepest of all histories; and Shakespeare is profounder and longer lived than Maclaurin or Malthus or Ricardo.

Lamb's career throughout his later years was marked by an enlarged intercourse with society,

(it had never been confined to persons of his own way of thinking); by more frequent absences in the country and elsewhere; and by the reception of a somewhat wider body of acquaintance into his own house. He visited the Universities, in which he much delighted: he fraternized with many of the contributors to the "London Magazine." He received the letters and calls of his admirers; strangers and others. These were now much extended in number, by the publication of the Essays of Elia. I was in the habit of seeing him very frequently at his home; I met him also at Mr. Cary's, at Leigh Hunt's, at Novello's, at Haydon's, once at Hazlitt's, and elsewhere. It must have been about this time that one of his visits (which always took place when the students were absent) was made to Oxford, where he met George Dyer, dreaming amongst the quadrangles, as he has described in his pleasant paper called "Oxford in the Vacation." Lamb's letters to correspondents are perhaps not quite so frequent now, as formerly. He writes occasionally to his old friends; to Wordsworth and Southey and Coleridge; also to Manning,

who is still in China, and to whom in December, 1815, he had sent one of his best and most characteristic letters, describing the (imaginary) death and decrepitude of his correspondent's friends in England; although he takes care (the next day) to tell him that his first was a "lying letter." Indeed that letter itself, humorous as it is, is so obviously manufactured in the fabulous district of hyperbole, that it requires no disavowal. Manning, however, returns to England not long afterwards, and then the correspondence, if less humorous, is also less built up of improbabilities. He corresponds also with Mr. Barron Field, who is relegated to the Judicial Bench in New South Wales. Of him he enquires about "The Land of Thieves:" he wants to know if their poets be not plagiarists; and suggests that half the truth which his letters contain "will be converted into lies" before they reach his correspondent. Mr. Field is the gentleman to whom the pleasant paper on "Distant Correspondents" is addressed.

In 1822 Charles Lamb and his sister travelled as far as Paris; neither of them understanding a

word of the French language. What tempted them to undertake this expedition I never knew. Perhaps, as he formerly said, when journeying to the Lakes, it was merely a daring ambition to see "remote regions." The French journey seems to have been almost barren of good. He brought nothing back in his memory; and there is no account whatever of his adventures there. It has been stated that Mary Lamb was taken ill on the road; but I do not know this with certainty. From a short letter to Barron Field, it appears, indeed, that he thought Paris "a glorious picturesque old city," to which London looked "mean and new," although the former had "no Saint Paul's or Westminster Abbey." "I and sister," he writes, "are just returned from Paris. We have eaten frogs!—It has been such a treat. Nicest little delicate things; like Lilliputian rabbits. But this is all. His Reminiscences, whatever they were, do not enrich his correspondence. In conversation he used to tell how he had once intended to ask the waiter for an egg (œuf), but called, in his ignorance, for Eau de vie, and that the mistake produced so pleasant

a result, that his enquiries afterwards for Eau de vie were very frequent.

In his travels to Cambridge, which began to be frequent about this time, his gains were greater. For there he first became acquainted with Miss Emma Isola, for whom, as I can testify, he at all times exhibited the greatest parental regard. When he and Mary Lamb first knew her, she was a little orphan girl, at school. They invited her to spend her holidays with them; and she went accordingly: the liking became mutual, and gradually deepened into great affection. The visit once made and so much relished, became habitual; and Miss Isola's holidays were afterwards regularly spent at the Lambs' house. She used to take long walks with Charles, when his sister was too old and infirm to accompany him. Ultimately she was looked upon in the light of a child: and Charles Lamb when speaking of her (and he did this always tenderly), used invariably to call her "Our Emma." To show how deep his regard was, he at one time was invited to engage in some profitable engagement (1830) whilst Miss Isola was

in bad health; but he at once replied, "Whilst she is in danger, and till she is out of it, I feel that I have no spirits for an engagement of any kind." Some years afterwards when she became well, and was about to be married, Lamb writes: "I am about to lose my only walk companion," whose mirthful spirits (as he prettily terms it) were "the youth of our house." "With my perfect approval, and more than concurrence," as he states, she was to be married to Mr. Moxon. Miss Emma Isola, who was, in Charles Lamb's phrase, "a very dear friend of ours;" remained his friend till death, and became eventually his principal legatee. After her marriage, Charles, writing to her husband (Nov., 1833), says: "Tell Emma I every day love her more, and miss her less. Tell her so, from her loving Uncle, as she has let me call myself." It was, as I believe, a very deep paternal affection.

The particulars disclosed by the letters of 1823 and 1824 are so generally unimportant, that it is unnecessary to refer to them. Lamb, indeed, became acquainted with the author of "Virginius" (Sheridan Knowles), with Mr. Macready, and with the writers

in the "London Magazine" (which then had not been long established). And he appears gradually to discover that his work at the India House is wearisome, and complains of it in bitter terms: "Thirty years have I served the Philistines" (he writes to Wordsworth) "and my neck is not subdued to the yoke." He confesses that he had once hoped to have a pension on "this side of absolute incapacity and infirmity," and to have walked out in the "fine Isaac Walton mornings, careless as a beggar, and walking, walking, and dying walking;" but he says "the hope is gone. I sit like Philomel all day (but not singing), with my breast against this thorn of a desk." The character of his letters at this time is not generally lively; there is, he says "a certain deadness to everything, which I think I may date from poor John's [his brother's] loss. Deaths overset one. Then there's Captain Burney gone. What fun has whist now?" He proceeds, "I am made up of queer points. My theory is to enjoy life: but my practice is against it." The only hope he has, he says, is "that some pulmonary affection may

relieve me."—The success which attended the "Elia" Essays did not comfort him, nor the (pecuniary) temptations of the bookseller to renew them. "The spirit of the thing in my own mind is gone" (he writes). "Some brains," as Ben Johnson says, "will endure but one skimming." Notwithstanding his melancholy humour, however, there is Hope in the distance, which he does not see, and Freedom is not far off.

It was during this period of Lamb's life (1823) that the quarrel between him and his old friend Robert Southey took place. Southey had long been (as was well known) one of the most constant and efficient contributors to the "Quarterly Review;" and Lamb assigned to him the authorship of one of the Review articles, in which he himself was scantily complimented, and his friends Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt denounced. Sir T. Talfourd thinks that Mr. Southey was not the author of the offending essay. Be that as it may, Lamb was then of opinion that his old Tory friend was the enemy. In a letter to Bernard Barton (July, 1823) he writes, "Southey has attacked 'Elia,' on the

score of infidelity. He might have spared an old friend. I hate his Review, and his being a Reviewer;" but he adds "I love and respect Southey, and will not retort." However, in the end, irritated by the calumny, or (which is more probable) resenting compliments bestowed on himself at the expense of his friends, he sat down and penned his famous "Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esq.," which appeared in the "London Magazine" for October, 1823, and which was afterwards published amongst his collected letters.

This letter, I remember, produced a strong sensation in literary circles; and Mr. Southey's acquaintances smiled, and his enemies rejoiced at it. Indeed, the Letter itself is a remarkable document. With much of Lamb's peculiar phraseology, it is argumentative and defends the imaginary weaknesses or faults, against what (as he guesses) the "Quarterly" reproofs had been levelled. The occasion having gone by, this letter has been dismissed from most minds; except that part of it which exhibits Lamb's championship, on behalf of Hunt and Hazlitt; and which is

more touching than anything to be found in controversial literature.

Lamb's letter was unknown to his sister, until after it appeared in the Magazine, it being his practice to write his letters in Leadenhall Street. It caused her a good deal of annoyance, when she saw it in print. It is pleasant to think, however, that it was the means of restoring the old intimacy between Southey and Lamb, and also of strengthening the friendship between Lamb and Hazlitt, which some misunderstanding, at that time, had a little loosened.

When I was married (October, 1824,) Lamb sent me a congratulatory letter; which, as it was not published by Sir T. Talfourd, and is, moreover, characteristic, I insert here, from the MS.

"My Dear Procter,—I do agnise a shame in not having been to pay my congratulations to Mrs. Procter and your happy self, but on Sunday (my only morning) I was engaged to a country walk; and in virtue of the hypostatical union between

us, when Mary calls, it is understood that I call too, we being univocal.

"But indeed I am ill at these ceremonious inductions. I fancy I was not born with a call on my head, though I have brought one down upon it with a vengeance. I love not to pluck that sort of frail crude, but to stay its ripening into visits. In probability Mary will be at Southampton Row this morning, and something of that kind be matured between you, but in any case not many hours shall elapse before I shake you by the hand.

"Meantime give my kindest felicitations to Mrs. Procter, and assure her I look forward with the greatest delight to our acquaintance. By the way, the deuce a bit of cake has come to hand, which hath an inauspicious look at first, but I comfort myself that that Mysterious Service hath the property of Sacramental Bread, which mice cannot nibble, nor time moulder.

"I am married myself—to a severe step-wife—who keeps me, not at bed and board, but at desk and board, and is jealous of my morning aberrations. I cannot slip out to congratulate kinder unions.

It is well she leaves me alone o' nights—the d—d Day-hag *Business*. She is even now peeping over me to see I am writing no Love Letters. I come, my dear—Where is the Indigo Sale Book?

"Twenty adieus, my dear friends, till we meet.

"Yours most truly,

"C. LAMB.

"*Leadenhall, Nov. 11th*, '24."

The necessity for labour continued for some short time longer.—At last (in the beginning of the year 1825) deliverance came. Charles had previously intimated his wish to resign. The directors of the East India House call him into their private room, and after complimenting him on his long and meritorious services, they suggest that his health does not appear to be good; that a little ease is expedient at his time of life, and they then conclude their conversation, by suddenly intimating their intention of granting him a pension for his life, of two-thirds of the amount of his salary; "a magnificent offer," as he terms it. He is from that moment emancipated; let loose from all ties of

labour, free to fly wheresoever he will. At the commencement of the talk Charles had had misgivings, for he was summoned into the "formidable back parlour," he says, and thought that the Directors were about to intimate that they had no further occasion for his services. The whole scene seems like one of the summer sunsets, preceded by threatenings of tempest, when the dark piles of clouds are separated and disappear, lost and swallowed by the radiance which fills the whole length and breadth of the sky, and looks as if it would be eternal. "I don't know what I answered," Lamb says, "between surprise and gratitude; but it was understood that I accepted their proposal, and I was told that I was free from that hour to leave their service. I stammered out a bow, and, at just ten minutes after eight, I went home—for ever." —At this time Lamb's salary was £600 per annum. The amount of two-thirds of this sum therefore would be an annuity of £400. But an annual provision was also made for his sister, in case she should survive him, and this occasioned a small diminution. In exact figures, he was to receive £391 a year

during the remainder of his life, and then an annuity was to become payable to Mary Lamb. His sensations, first of stupefaction, and afterwards of measureless delight, will be seen by reference to his exulting letters of this period. First he writes to Wordsworth of "the good that has befallen me." These are his words: "I came home—for ever—on Tuesday last. The incomprehensibleness of my condition overwhelmed me. It was like passing from Time into Eternity." * * * "Mary wakes every morning with an obscure feeling that some good has happened to us."—To Bernard Barton his words are, "I have scarce steadiness of head to compose a letter. I am free, B. B.; free as air. I will live another fifty years." * * "Would I could sell you some of my leisure! Positively the best thing a man can have to do is—NOTHING: and next to that, perhaps, Good Works."—To Miss Hutchinson he writes, "I would not go back to my prison for seven years longer for £10,000 a-year. For some days I was staggered, and could not comprehend the magnitude of my deliverance; was confused, giddy. But these giddy feelings

have gone away, and my weather-glass stands at a degree or two above " CONTENT." All being holidays, I feel as if I had none; as they do in Heaven, where 'tis all Red Letter days."

Lamb's discharge or relief was timely and graciously bestowed. It opened a bright vista through which he beheld (in hope) many years of enjoyment; scenes in which his spirit, rescued from painful work, had only to disport itself in endless delights. He had well earned his discharge. He had laboured without cessation for thirty-three years; had been diligent, and trusted—a labourer worthy of his hire. And the consciousness of this long and good service must have mingled with his reward and sweetened it. It is a great thing to have earned your meal—your rest,—whatever may be the payment in full for your deserts. You have not to force up gratitude from oblivious depths, day by day, for undeserved bounty. In Lamb's case it happened, unfortunately, that the activity of mind which had procured his repose, tended afterwards to disqualify him from enjoying it. The leisure that he had once reckoned on so much, exceeded,

when it came, the pains of the old counting-house travail. It is only the imbecile, or those brought up in complete lazyhood, who can encounter successfully the monotony of "nothing to do," and can slumber away their lives unharmed amongst the dumb weeds and flowers.

In the course of a short time it appeared that he was unable to enjoy so perfectly as he had anticipated, his golden time of "Nothing to do," his Liberia. He therefore took long walks into the country. He also acquired the companionship of the large dog, Dash, much given to wandering, to whose erratic propensities (Lamb walking at the rate of fourteen miles a day) he eventually became a slave. The rambling, inconstant dog rendered the clear serene day of leisure almost turbid; and he was ultimately, (in order to preserve for Charles some little remaining enjoyment), bestowed upon another master. Lamb was always (as I have said) fond of walking, and he had some vague liking, I suppose, for free air and green pastures; although he had no great relish specially for the flowers and ornaments of the country. I have often walked with him, in the

neighbourhood of our great city; and I do not think that he ever treasured up in his memory the violets (or other flowers), the songs of birds, or the pictures of sheep or kine dotting the meadows. Neither his conversation nor writings afforded evidence that he had done so. It is not easy therefore to determine what the special attractions were that drew him out of London, which he loved, into the adjoining country, where his walks oftenest lay.

At the time of Lamb's deliverance from office labour, he was living in Colebrook Row. It was there that George Dyer, whose blindness and absence of mind rendered it almost dangerous for him to wander unaccompanied about the suburbs of London, came to visit him on one occasion. By accident, instead of entering the house door, Dyer's aqueous instincts led him towards the water, and in a moment he had plunged overhead in the New River. I happened to go to Lamb's house, about an hour after his rescue and restoration to dry land, and met Miss Lamb in the passage, in a state of great alarm: she was whimpering, and could only utter "Poor Mr.

Dyer! Poor Mr. Dyer," in tremulous tones. I went upstairs, aghast, and found that the involuntary diver had been placed in bed, and that Miss Lamb had administered brandy and water, as a well established preventive against cold. Dyer, unaccustomed to anything stronger than the "crystal spring," was sitting upright in the bed, perfectly delirious. His hair had been rubbed up, and stood out like so many needles of iron grey. He did not (like Falstaff) babble of "green fields," but of the "watery Neptune." "I soon found out where I was," he cried out to me, laughing; and then he went wandering on, his words taking flight into regions where no one could follow. Charles Lamb has commemorated this immersion of his old friend, in his (Elia) essay of "Amicus redivivus."

In the summer of 1826 Lamb published, in "Blackwood's Magazine," a little drama in one act, entitled "The Wife's Trial." It was founded on Crabbe's poetical tale of "The Confidant;" and contains the germ of a plot, which undoubtedly might have been worked out

with more effect, if Lamb had devoted sufficient labour to that object.

Amongst the remarkable persons whom Charles became acquainted with, in these years, was Edward Irving. Lamb used to meet him at Coleridge's house at Highgate, and elsewhere; and he came to the conclusion that he was (as indeed he *was*) a fine sincere spirited man, terribly slandered. Edward Irving, who issued, like a sudden light, from the obscure little town of Annan, in Scotland, acquired, in the year 1822, a wide reputation in London. He was a minister of the Scotch Church, and before he came to England had acted as an assistant preacher to Dr. Chalmers. In one of Charles's letters (in 1835) to Bernard Barton (who had evidently been measuring Irving by a low Quaker standard), he takes the opportunity of speaking of the great respect that he entertained for the Scotch minister. "Let me adjure you" (writes Charles), "have no doubt of Irving. Let Mr. ——[?] drop his disrespect."—"Irving has prefixed a dedication, of a missionary character, to Coleridge—most beautiful,

cordial, and sincere. He there acknowledges his obligations to S. T. C., at whose Gamaliel feet he sits weekly, rather than to all men living." Again he writes: "Some friend said to Irving, 'This will do you no good' (no good in worldly repute). '*That is a reason for doing it*,' quoth Irving. I am thoroughly pleased with him. He is firm, out-speaking, intrepid, and docile as a pupil of Pythagoras." In April, 1825, Lamb writes to Wordsworth to the same effect. "Have you read the noble dedication of Irving's Missionary Sermons?" he inquires; and then he repeats Irving's fine answer to the suggested impolicy of publishing his book with its sincere prefix.—Poor Edward Irving! whom I always deeply respected, and knew intimately for some years, and who was one of the best and truest men whom it has been my good fortune to meet in life! He entered London amidst the shouts of his admirers, and he departed in the midst of contumely; sick and sad, and maligned, and misunderstood; going back to his dear native Scotland only to die. The time has long passed for discussing the truths or errors of

Edward Irving's peculiar creed; but there can be no doubt that he himself was true and faithful till death; and that he preached only what he entirely believed. And what can man do more?—If he was wrong, his errors arose from his extreme modesty, his extreme veneration, for the subject to which he raised his thoughts.

In the last year of Edward Irving's life (1834), he was counselled by his physician to pass the next winter in a milder climate—that "it was the only safe thing for him." Prevented from ministering in his own church, where "he had become an embarrassment," he travels into the rural places, subdued and chastened by his weakness,—to the Wye and the Severn—to the fine mountains and pleasant places of Wales. Sometimes he thinks himself better. He quits London (for ever) in the early part of September, and on the 23rd of that month he writes to his wife that he is "surely better, for *his pulse has come to be under* 100." He passes by Cader Idris and Snowdon—by Bedgelert to Bangor, "a place of repose;" but gets wet whilst viewing the Menai Bridge, and had "a

fevered night;" yet he is able to droop on to Liverpool. Thence (the love of his native land drawing him on) he goes northwards, instead of to the south. He reaches Glasgow, where "he thinks of organizing a church;" although Dr. Darling "decidedly says that he cannot humanly live over the winter." Yet still he goes on with his holy task; he writes "pastoral letters," and preaches, and prays, and offers kind advice. His friends, from Kirkcaldy and elsewhere, come to see him, where "for a few weeks still, he is visible, about Glasgow. In the sunshine—in a lonely street, his gaunt gigantic figure rises feebly against the light." At last he lies down on "the bed from which he is never to rise;" his mind wanders, and his articulation becomes indistinct; but he is occasionally understood, and is heard murmuring (in Hebrew) parts of the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd: He leadeth me beside the still waters." And thus gradually sinking, at the close of a gloomy Sunday night in December, he dies.

Mr. Thomas Carlyle, his friend (the friend of his youth), has written an eloquent epitaph upon

him; not partial, for they differed in opinion—but eloquent, and very touching. I read it over once or twice in every year. Edward Irving's last words, according to his statement, were, "In life and in death I am the Lord's." Carlyle then adds:—"But for Irving, I had never known what the communion of man with man means. He was the freest, brotherliest, bravest human soul mine ever came in contact with: the best man I have ever (after trial enough) found in this world, or now hope to find."

So Edward Irving went to the true and brave enthusiasts who have gone before him. He died on his final Sabbath (7th December, 1834), and left the world and all its troubles behind him.

CHAPTER VII.

SPECIMEN OF LAMB'S HUMOUR—DEATH OF MR. NORRIS—GARRICK PLAYS—LETTERS TO BARTON—OPINIONS ON BOOKS—BREAKFAST WITH MR. N. P. WILLIS—MOVES TO ENFIELD—CARICATURE OF LAMB—ALBUMS AND ACROSTICS—PAINS OF LEISURE—THE BARTON CORRESPONDENCE—DEATH OF HAZLITT—MUNDEN'S ACTING AND QUITTING THE STAGE—LAMB BECOMES A BOARDER—MOVES TO EDMONTON—METROPOLITAN ATTACHMENTS—DEATH OF COLERIDGE—LAMB'S FALL AND DEATH—DEATH OF MARY LAMB—POSTSCRIPT.

With the expiration of the "London Magazine," Lamb's literary career terminated. A few trifling contributions to the "New Monthly," and other periodicals, are scarcely sufficient to qualify this statement.

It may be convenient, in this place, to specify some of those examples of humour and of jocose speech, for which Charles Lamb in his lifetime was well known. These (not his best thoughts) can be separated from the rest, and may attract the notice of the reader, here and there, and relieve the tameness of a not very eventful narrative.

J. A. Vinter, lith. Day & Son, Limited, Lith.

CHARLES LAMB.

(From a portrait by Meyer.)

It is possible to define wit, (which, as Mr. Coleridge says, is "impersonal"), and humour also; but it is not easy to distinguish the humour of one man from that of all other humourists, so as to bring his special quality clearly before the apprehension of the reader. Perhaps the best (if not the most scientific) way, might be to produce specimens of each. In Charles Lamb's case, instances of his humour are to be found in his essays, in his sayings (already partially reported), and throughout his letters; where they are very frequent. They are often of the composite order, in which humour and wit and (sometimes) pathos are intermingled. Sometimes they merely exhibit the character of the man.

He once said of himself that his biography "would go into an epigram." His sayings require greater space. Some of those which have been circulated are apocryphal. The following are taken chiefly from his letters, and from my own recollections.

—In his exultation, on being released from his thirty-four years of labour at the India House, he

says "Had I a little son, I would christen him 'Nothing to do.'" (This is in "the Superannuated man.")

Speaking of Don Quixote he calls him "the errant Star of Knighthood, made more tender by eclipse."

On being asked by a schoolmistress for some sign indicative of her calling, he recommended "The Murder of the Innocents."

I once said something in his presence, which I thought possessed smartness. He commended me with a stammer: "Very well, my dear boy, very well; Ben (taking a pinch of snuff), Ben Jonson has said worse things than that—and and b—b—better."*

His young chimney sweepers "from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys) in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind."

His saying to Martin Burney has been often repeated: "Oh Martin, if dirt were trumps, what a hand you would hold!"

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* This, with a small variation, is given in Mr. Thomas Moore's autobiography. I suppose I must have repeated it to him, and that he forgot the precise words.

To Coleridge, "Bless you, old sophist, who next to human nature taught me all the corruption I was capable of knowing."

To Mr. Gilman, a surgeon ("query Killman?"), he writes, "Coleridge is very bad, but he wonderfully picks up, and his face, when he repeats his verses, hath its ancient glory: an archangel a little damaged."

To Wordsworth (who was superfluously solemn), he writes, "Some d—d people have come in, and I must finish abruptly. By d—d, I only mean deuced."

The second son of George the Second, it was said, had a very cold and ungenial manner. Lamb stammered out in his defence that "this was very natural in the Duke of Cu-Cumber-land."

To Bernard Barton, of a person of repute: "There must be something in him. Such great names imply greatness. Which of us has seen Michael Angelo's things? yet which of us disbelieves his greatness?"

To Mrs. H., of a person eccentric, "Why

does not his guardian angel look to him? He deserves one—may be he has tired him out."

"Charles," said Coleridge to Lamb, "I think you have heard me preach?" "I n—n—never heard you do anything else," replied Lamb.

One evening Coleridge had consumed the whole time in talking of some "regenerated" orthodoxy. Leigh Hunt, who was one of the listeners, on leaving the house, expressed his surprise at the prodigality and intensity of Coleridge's religious expressions. Lamb tranquillized him by "Ne—ne—never mind what Coleridge says; he's full of fun."

There were, &c., &c., "and at the top of all, Hunger (eldest, strongest of the Passions,) predominant, breaking down the stony fences of shame."

The Bank, the India House and other rich traders look insultingly on the old deserted South Sea House, as on "their poor neighbour out of business."

To a Frenchman, setting up Voltaire's character in opposition to that of Christ, Lamb asserted

that "Voltaire was a very good Jesus Christ—*for the French*."

Of a Scotchman. "His understanding is always at its meridian. Between the affirmative and the negative there is no border land with him. You cannot hover with him on the confines of truth."

On a book of Coleridge's nephew he writes, "I confess he has more of the Sterne about him than the Sternhold. But he saddens into excellent sense, before the conclusion."

As to a monument being erected for Clarkson, in his lifetime, he opposes it; and argues "Goodness blows no trumpet, nor desires to have it blown. We should be modest for a modest man."

"M. B. is on the top scale of my friendship's ladder, which an angel or two is still climbing: and some, alas, descending."

A fine sonnet of his (The Gipsy's Malison) being refused publication, he exclaimed "Hang the age! I will write for Antiquity."

Once, whilst waiting in the Highgate stage a woman came to the door and inquired in a

stern voice, "Are you quite full inside?" "Yes, ma'am," said Charles, in meek reply, "quite; that plateful of Mrs. Gillman's pudding has quite filled us."

Mrs. K., after expressing her love for her young children, added, tenderly, "And how do *you* like babies, Mr. Lamb?" His answer, immediate, almost precipitate, was "Boi-boi-boiled, ma'am."

Hood tempting Lamb to dine with him, said "We have a hare." "And many friends?" enquired Lamb.

It being suggested that he would not sit down to a meal with the Italian witnesses at the Queen's trial, Lamb rejected the imputation, asserting that he would sit with anything, except a hen or a tailor.

Of a man too prodigal of lampoons and verbal jokes, Lamb said, threateningly, "I'll Lamb-pun him."

On two Prussians of the same name being accused of the same crime, it was remarked as curious that they were not in any way related to each other. "A mistake," said he, "they are cozens german."

An old lady, fond of her dissenting minister, wearied Lamb by the length of her praises. I speak, because I *know* him well, said she. "Well, I don't;" replied Lamb; "I don't; but d——n him, at a 'venture.'"

The Scotch, whom he did not like, ought, he said, to have double punishment; and to have fire without brimstone.

Southey, in 1799, showed him a dull poem on a rose; Lamb's criticism was "Your rose is insipid: it has neither thorns nor sweetness."

A person sending an unnecessarily large sum with a lawyer's brief, Lamb said it was 'a fee simple.'"

Mr. H. C. Robinson, just called to the bar, tells him, exultingly, that he is retained in a cause in the King's Bench. "Ah," (said Lamb,) "the great first cause, least understood."

Of a pun, Lamb says it is "a noble thing *per se*. It is entire. It fills the mind; it is as perfect as a sonnet; better. It limps ashamed, in the train and retinue of humour."*

* I fear that I have not, in all the foregoing instances, set forth with sufficient precision, the grounds or premises upon which the jests were founded. There

Lamb's puns, as far as I recollect, were not frequent; and, except in the case of a pun, it is

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were moreover, various other sayings of Lamb, which do not come into the above catalogue; as where—when enjoying a pipe with Dr. Parr, that Divine enquired how he came to acquire the love of smoking so much, he replied "I toiled after it as some people do after virtue."—When Godwin was expatiating on the benefit of unlimited freedom of thought, especially in matters of religion, Lamb, who did not like this, interrupted him by humming the little child's song of "Old father Longlegs won't say his prayers," adding, violently, "*Throw him down stairs!*"—He consoles Mr. Crabb Robinson, suffering under tedious rheumatism, by writing "Your doctor seems to keep you under the long cure."—To Wordsworth, in order to explain that his friend A was in good health, he writes, "A is well, he is proof against weather, ingratitude, meat underdone, and every weapon of fate." The story of Lamb replying to some one, who insisted very strenuously on some uninteresting circumstances being "a matter of fact," by saying that *he* was "a matter of lie" man, is like Leigh Hunt, who in opposing the frequent confessions of "I'm in love," asserted, in a series of verses, that he was "In hate."—Charles hated noise and fuss and fine words, but never hated any person. Once when he had said "I hate Z," some one present remonstrated with him, "Why, you have never seen him." "No," replied Lamb, "certainly not; I never could hate any man that I have once seen."—Being asked how he felt when amongst the lakes and mountains of Cumberland, he replied that he was obliged to think of the Ham and Beef shop near Saint Martin's Lane; this was in order to bring down his thoughts from their almost too painful elevation, to the sober regions of every day life.

In the foregoing little history, I have set forth such facts as tend, in my opinion, to illustrate my friend's character. One anecdote I have omitted, and it should not be forgotten. Lamb, one day, encountered a small urchin loaded with a too heavy package of grocery. It caused him to tremble and stop. Charles enquired where he was going, took (although weak) the load upon his own shoulder, and managed to carry it to Islington, the place of destination. Finding that the purchaser of the grocery was a female, he went with the urchin before her, and expressed a hope that she would intercede with the poor boy's master, in order to prevent his being overweighted in future. "Sir," said the dame, after the manner of Tisiphone, frowning upon him, "I buy my sugar and have nothing to do with the man's manner of sending it." Lamb at once perceived the character of the purchaser, and taking off his hat, said, humbly, "Then I hope ma'am you'll give me a drink of small beer." This was of course refused. He afterwards called upon the grocer, on the boy's behalf. With what effect I do not know.

difficult to divest a good saying of the facts surrounding it without impoverishing the saying itself. Lamb's humour is generally embedded in the surrounding sense; and cannot often be disentangled without injury.

I have said that the proprietorship of the "London Magazine," in the year 1821, became vested in Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, under whom it became a social centre for the meeting of many literary men. The publication, however, seems to have interfered with the ordinary calling of the booksellers; and the sale was not therefore (I suppose) sufficiently important to remunerate them for the disturbance of their general trade. At all events, it was sold to Mr. Henry Southern, the editor of "The Retrospective Review," at the expiration of 1825, after having been in existence during five entire years. In Mr. Southern's hands, under a different system of management, it speedily ceased.

In 1826 (January) Charles Lamb suffered great grief from the loss of a very old friend, Mr. Norris. It may be remembered that he was one

of the two persons who went to comfort Lamb when his mother so suddenly died. Mr. Norris had been one of the officers of the Inner Temple or Christ's Hospital, and had been intimate with the Lambs for many years; and Charles, when young, used always to spend his Christmases with him. "He was my friend and my father's friend," Lamb writes, "all the life I can remember. I seem to have made foolish friendships ever since. Old as I am, in his eyes, I was still the child he first knew me. To the last, he called me 'Charley.' I have none to call me Charley now. He was the last link that bound me to the Temple."

It was after his death that Lamb once more resorted to the British Museum; which he had been in the habit of frequenting formerly, when his first "Dramatic Specimens" were published. Now he went there to make other extracts from the old plays. These were entitled "The Garrick Plays," and were bestowed upon Mr. Hone, who was poor, and were by him published in his "Every Day Book." Subsequently they

were collected by Charles himself, and formed a supplement to the earlier "Specimens." Lamb's labours in this task were by no means trivial. "I am now going through a course of reading," (of old plays,) he writes, "I have two thousand to go through."

Lamb's correspondence with his Quaker friend, Bernard Barton, ("the busy B," as Hood called him,) whose knowledge of the English drama was confined to Shakespeare and Miss Baillie, went on constantly. His letters to this gentleman comprised a variety of subjects, on most of which Charles offers him good advice. Sometimes they are less personal, as where he tells him that "six hundred have been sold of Hood's book; while Sion's songs do not disperse so quickly;" and where he enters (very ably) into the defects and merits of Martin's pictures, Belshazzar and Joshua; and ventures an opinion as to what Art should and should not be. He is strenuous in advising him not to forsake the Bank (where he is a clerk) and throw himself on what the chance of employ by booksellers would

afford. "Throw yourself, rather, from the steep Tarpeian rock, headlong upon the iron spikes. Keep to your bank, and your bank will keep you. Trust not to the Public," he says. Then, referring to his own previous complaints of official toil, he adds, "I retract all my fond complaints. Look on them as lovers' quarrels. I was but half in earnest. Welcome, dead timber of a desk that gives me life. A little grumbling is wholesome for the spleen; but in my inner heart I do approve and embrace this our close but unharassing way of life."

Lamb's opinions on books, as well as on conduct, making some deduction for his preference of old writers, is almost always sound. When he is writing to Mr. Walter Wilson, who is editing De Foe, he says of the famous author of "Robinson Crusoe:"—

"In appearance of *truth* his works exceed any works of fiction that I am acquainted with. It is perfect illusion. It is like reading evidence in a court of justice. There is all the minute detail of a log-book in it. Facts are repeated in varying

phrases till you cannot choose but believe them." His liking for books (rather than his criticism on them) is shown frequently in his letters. "Oh! to forget Fielding, Steele, &c., and to read 'em *new*," he says. Of De Foe, "His style is everywhere beautiful, but plain and homely." Again, he speaks of "Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, — great Nature's stereotypes." "Milton," he says, "almost requires a solemn service of music to be played before you enter upon him." Of Shenstone he speaks as "the dear author of the School-mistress;" and so on from time to time, as occasion prompts, of Bunyan, Isaac Walton, and Jeremy Taylor, and Fuller and Sir Philip Sidney, and others in affectionate terms. These always relate to English authors. Lamb, although a good Latinist, had not much of that which ordinarily passes under the name of Learning. He had little knowledge of languages, living or dead. Of French, German, Italian, &c., he knew nothing; and in Greek his acquirements were very moderate. These children of the tongues were never adopted by him; but in his own Saxon English he was a com-

petent scholar, a lover, nice, discriminative, and critical.

The most graphic account of Lamb at a somewhat later period of his life appears in Mr. N. P. Willis's "Pencillings by the Way." He had been invited by a gentleman in the Temple, Mr. R—— (Robinson?), to meet Charles Lamb and his sister at breakfast. The Lambs lived at that time "a little way out of London, and were not quite punctual. At last, they enter; "the gentleman in black small, clothes and gaiters, short and very slight in person; his head set on his shoulders with a thoughtful forward bent, his hair just sprinkled with grey, a beautiful deep set eye, an aquiline nose, and a very indescribable mouth. Whether it expressed most humour or feeling, good nature or a kind of whimsical peevishness, or twenty other things which passed over it by turns, I cannot in the least be certain." This is Mr. Willis's excellent picture of Lamb at that period. The guest places a large arm-chair for Mary Lamb; Charles pulls it away, saying, gravely, "Mary, don't take it; it looks as if you were going to have a tooth drawn." Miss

Lamb was at that time very hard of hearing, and Charles took advantage of her temporary deafness to impute various improbabilities to her, which however were so obvious as to render any denial or explanation unnecessary. Willis told Charles that he had bought a copy of the "Elia" in America, in order to give to a friend. "What did you give for it?" asked Lamb. "About seven and sixpence." "Permit me to pay you that," said Lamb, counting out the money with earnestness on the table; "I never yet wrote anything that could sell. I am the publisher's ruin. My last poem won't sell,—not a copy. Have you seen it." No; Willis had not. "It's only eighteenpence, and I'll give you sixpence toward it," said Lamb; and he described where Willis would find it, "sticking up in a shop-window in the Strand." Lamb ate nothing; but enquired anxiously for some potted fish, which Mr. R—— used to procure for him. There was none in the house; he therefore asked to see the cover of the pot which had contained it; he thought it would do him good. It was brought, and on it

was a picture of the fish. Lamb kissed it, and then left the table and began to wander about the room, with an uncertain step, &c.

This visit must have taken place, I suppose, at or after the time when Lamb was living at Colebrook Cottage; and the breakfast took place probably in Mr. Henry Crabbe Robinson's chambers in the Temple, where I first met Wordsworth.

In the year 1827 Lamb moved into a small house at Enfield, a "gamboge coloured house," he calls it, where I and other friends went to dine with him; but it was too far from London, except for rare visits.—It was rather before that time that a very clever caricature of him had been designed and engraved ("scratched on copper," as the artist termed it) by Mr. Brook Pulham. It is still extant; and although somewhat ludicrous and hyperbolical in the countenance and outline, it certainly renders a likeness of Charles Lamb. The nose is monstrous, and the limbs are dwarfed and attenuated. Lamb himself, in a letter to Bernard Barton, (10th August, 1827,) adverts to it in these terms, "'Tis a little sixpenny thing: too

like by half, in which the draughtsman has done his best to avoid flattery." Charles's hatred for annuals and albums was continually breaking out, "I die of albophobia." "I detest to appear in an annual," he writes; "I hate the paper, the type, the gloss, the dandy plates." "Coleridge is too deep," again he says, "among the prophets, the gentleman annuals." "If I take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, there will albums be." To Southey he writes about this time, "I have gone lately into the acrostic line. I find genius declines with me; but I get clever." The reader readily appreciates the distinction, which the humourist thus cleverly (more than cleverly) makes. In proof of his subdued quality, however, under the acrostical tyranny, I quote two little unpublished specimens addressed to the Misses Locke, whom he had never seen.

To M. L. [Mary Locke.]

Must I write with pen unwilling,
And describe those graces killing,
Rightly, which I never saw?
Yes—it is the album's law.

Let me then invention strain,
On your excelling grace to feign,
Cold is fiction. I believe it
Kindly as I did receive it ;
Even as I. F.'s tongue did weave it.

To S. L. [Sarah Locke.]

Shall I praise a face unseen,
And extol a fancied mien,
Rave on visionary charm,
And from shadows take alarm!
Hatred hates without a cause.

Love may love without applause,
Or, without a reason given,
Charmed be with unknown heaven.
Keep the secret, though, unmocked,
Ever in your bosom Locked.

After the transfer to Mr. Southern of the "London Magazine," Lamb was prevailed upon to allow some short papers to be published in the "New Monthly Magazine." They were entitled "Popular Fallacies," and were subsequently published conjointly with the "Elia Essays." He also sent brief contributions to the "Athenæum" and the "Englishman," and wrote some election squibs for Serjeant Wilde, during his then contest for "Newark." But his animal spirits were not

so elastic as formerly, when his time was divided between official work and companionable leisure; the latter acting as a wholesome relief to his mind when wearied by labour.

On this subject hear him speaking to Bernard Barton, to whom, as to others, he had formerly complained of his harassing duties at the India House, and of his delightful prospect of leisure. Now he writes, "Deadly long are the days, with but half an hour's candle-light and no fire-light. The streets, the shops remain, but old friends are gone." "I assure you" (he goes on) "*no* work is worse than overwork. The mind preys on itself, the most unwholesome food. I have ceased to care almost for anybody." To remedy this tedium, he tries visiting; for the houses of his old friends were always open to him, and he had a welcome everywhere. But this visiting will not revive him. His spirits descended to zero: below it. He is convinced that happiness is not to be found abroad. It is better to go "to my hole at Enfield, and hide like a sick cat in my corner." Again, he says, "Home, I have none. Never did the

waters of heaven pour down on a forlorner head. What I can do, and over do, is to walk. I am a sanguinary murderer of time. But the snake is vital. Your forlorn—C. L." These are his meditations in 1829, four years only after he had rushed abroad, full of exaltation and delight, from the prison of a "work-a-day" life, into the happy gardens of boundless leisure. Time, which was once his friend, had become his enemy. His letters, which were always full of goodness, generally full of cheerful humour, sink into discontent. "I have killed an hour or two with this poor scrawl," he writes. It is unnecessary to inflict upon the reader all the points of the obvious moral, that obtrudes itself at this period of Charles Lamb's history. It is clear that the Otiosa Eternitas was pressing upon his days, and he did not know how to find relief. Although a good Latin scholar, indeed fond of writing letters in Latin, he did not at this period resort to classical literature. I heard him indeed once (and once only) quote the well-known Latin verse from the Georgics, "O Fortunatos," &c., but generally he showed

himself careless about Greeks and Romans; and when (as Mr. Moxon states) "a traveller brought him some acorns from an ilex that grew over the tomb of Virgil, he valued them so little that he threw them at the hackney coachmen as they passed by his window."

I have been much impressed by Lamb's letters to Bernard Barton, which are numerous, and which, taken altogether, are equal to any which he has written. The letters to Coleridge do not exhibit so much care or thought; nor those to Wordsworth or Manning, nor to any others of his intellectual equals. These correspondents could think and speculate for themselves, and they were accordingly left to their own resources. "The Volsces have much corn." But Bernard Barton was in a different condition: he was poor. His education had been inferior, his range of reading and thinking had been very confined, his knowledge of the English drama being limited to Shakespeare and Miss Baillie. He seems however to have been an amiable man, desirous of cultivating the power, such as

it was, which he possessed; and Lamb therefore lavished upon him—the poor Quaker clerk of a Suffolk Banker—all that his wants or ambition required; excellent worldly counsel; sound thoughts upon literature and art; critical advice on his own verses; letters, which in their actual value surpass the wealth of many more celebrated collections. Lamb's correspondence with Barton, whom he had first known in 1822, continued until his death.

In 1830 (September 18th) Hazlitt died. It is unnecessary to enter into any enumeration of his remarkable qualities. They were known to all his friends, and to some of his enemies. In Sir Edward Lytton's words, "He went down to the dust, without having won the crown for which he so bravely struggled. He who had done so much for the propagation of thought, left no stir upon the surface when he sank." I will not in this place attempt to weave the moral which nevertheless lies hid in his unrequited life. At that time the number of Lamb's old intimates was gradually diminished. The eternally recur-

ring madness of his sister was more frequent. The hopelessness of it — if hope indeed ever existed — was more palpable, more depressing. His own spring of mind was fast losing its power of rebound. He felt the decay of the active principle, and now confined his efforts to morsels of criticism, to verses for albums, and small contributions to periodicals, which (excepting only the "Popular Fallacies") it has not been thought important enough to reprint. To the editor of the "Athenæum" indeed he laments sincerely over the death of Munden. This was in February, 1832, and was a matter that touched his affections. "He was not an actor" (he writes) "but something better." To a reader of the present day, — even to a contemporary of Lamb himself, there was something almost amounting to extravagance in the terms of his admiration. Yet Munden was, in his way, a remarkable man; and although he was an actor in farce, he often stood aloof and beyond the farce itself. The play was a thing merely on which to hang his own conceptions. These did

not arise from the drama; but were elsewhere cogitated; and were interleaved, as it were, with the farce or comedy which served as an excuse for their display. The actor was to all intents and purposes *sui generis*.

To speak of my own impressions, Munden did not affect me much in some of his earlier performances; for then he depended on the play. Afterwards, when he took the matter into his own hands, and created personages who owed little or nothing to the playwright, then he became an inventor. He rose with the occasion. *Sic ivit ad astra.* In the Drama of "Modern Antiques," especially, space was allowed him for his movements. The words were nothing. The prosperity of the piece depended exclusively on the genius of the actor. Munden enacted the part of an old man credulous beyond ordinary credulity; and when he came upon the stage there was in him an almost sublime look of wonder, passing over the scene and people around him, and settling apparently somewhere beyond the moon. What he believed in, improbable as it was to mere terrestrial visions, you

at once conceived to be quite possible,—to be true. The sceptical idiots of the play pretend to give him a phial nearly full of water. He is assured that this contains Cleopatra's tear. Well; who can disprove it? Munden evidently recognised it. "What a large tear!" he exclaimed. Then they place in his hands a druidical harp, which to vulgar eyes might resemble a modern gridiron. He touches the chords gently: "pipes to the spirit ditties of no tone;" and you imagine Æolian strains. At last, William Tell's cap is produced. The people who affect to cheat him, apparently cut the rim from a modern hat, and place the scull-cap in his hands; and then begins the almost finest piece of acting that I ever witnessed. Munden accepts the accredited cap of Tell, with confusion and reverence. He places it slowly and solemnly on his head, growing taller in the act of crowning himself. Soon he swells into the heroic size; a great archer; and enters upon his dreadful task. He weighs the arrow carefully; he tries the tension of the bow, the elasticity of the string; and finally, after a most deliberate aim, he permits

the arrow to fly, and looks forward at the same time with intense anxiety. You hear the twang, you see the hero's knitted forehead, his eagerness; you tremble;—at last you mark his calmer brow, his relaxing smile, and are satisfied that the son is saved!—It is difficult to paint in words this extraordinary performance, which I have several times seen; but you feel that it is transcendent. You think of Sagittarius, in the broad circle of the Zodiac; you recollect that archery is as old as Genesis: you are reminded that Ishmael, the son of Hagar, wandered about the Judæan deserts and became an archer.

The old actor is now dead; but on his last performance, when he was to act Sir Robert Bramble, on the night of his taking final leave of the stage, Lamb greatly desired to be present. He had always loved the actors, especially the old actors, from his youth; and this was the last of the Romans. Accordingly Lamb and his sister went to the Drury Lane; but there being no room in the ordinary parts of the house (boxes or pit), Munden obtained places for his two visitors, in the

orchestra, close to the stage. He saw them carefully ushered in, and well posted; then acted with his usual vigour, and no doubt enjoyed the plaudits wrung from a thousand hands. Afterwards, in the interval between the comedy and the farce, he was seen to appear cautiously, diffidently, at the low door of the orchestra (where the musicians enter) and beckon to his friends; who then perceived that he was armed with a mighty pot of porter, for their refreshment. Lamb, grateful for the generous liquid, drank heartily but not ostentatiously, and returned the pot of beer to Munden, who had waited to remove it from fastidious eyes. He then retreated, into the farce, and then he retired—for ever.

After Munden's retirement Lamb almost entirely forsook the theatre; and his habits became more solitary. He had not relinquished society, nor professedly narrowed the circle of his friends. But insensibly his visitors became fewer in number and came less frequently. Some had died; some had grown old; some had increased occupation to care for. His old Wednesday evenings had ceased;

and he had placed several miles of road between London (the residence of their families) and his own home. The weight of years indeed had its effect, in pressing down his strength and buoyancy; his spirit no longer possessed its old power of rebound. Even the care of housekeeping (not very onerous one would suppose) troubled Charles and his sister so much, that they determined to abandon it. This occurred in 1829. Then they became boarders and lodgers, with an old person (T. W.), who was their next-door-neighbour at Enfield; and of him Lamb has given an elaborate description:—T. W., his new landlord or housekeeper, he says, is seventy years old; "he has something under a competence;" he has one joke, and £40 a year, upon which he retires in a green old age; he laughs when he hears a joke, and when (which is much oftener) he hears it not. Having served the greater parish offices, Lamb and his sister become greater, being *his* lodgers, than they were when substantial householders. The children of the village venerate him for his gentility; but wonder also at him, for a gentle endorsation of the

person, not amounting to a hump, or if one, then like that of the buffalo, and coronative of as mild qualities."

Writing to Wordsworth (and speaking as a great landed proprietor), he says "We have ridded ourselves of the dirty acres; settled down into poor boarders and lodgers; confiding ravens." The distasteful country, however, still remains, and the clouds still hang over it. "Let not the lying poets be believed, who entice men from the cheerful streets," he writes. The country, he thinks, does well enough when he is amongst his books, by the fire and with candle-light; but day and the green fields return and restore his natural antipathies; then he says "In a calenture I plunge into St. Giles's." So Lamb and his sister leave their comfortable little house and subside into the rooms of the Humpback. Their chairs and tables and beds also retreat; all except the ancient book-case full of his "ragged veterans." This I saw, years after Charles Lamb's death, in the possession of his sister, Mary. "All our furniture has faded," he writes, "under the auctioneer's hammer;

going for nothing, like the tarnished frippery of the prodigal." Four years afterwards (in 1833) Lamb moves to his last home, in Church Street, Edmonton: where he is somewhat nearer to his London friends.

Very curious was the antipathy of Charles to objects that are generally so pleasant to other men. It was not a passing humour, but a life-long dislike. He admired the trees and the meadows and murmuring streams in poetry. I have heard him repeat some of Keats's beautiful lines in the Ode to the Nightingale, about the "pastoral eglantine," with great delight. But that was another thing: that was an object in its proper place: that was a piece of art. Long ago he had admitted that the mountains of Cumberland were grand objects "to look at," but (as he said) "the houses in streets were the places to live in." I imagine that he would no more have received the former as an equivalent for his own modest home, than he would have accepted a portrait as a substitute for a friend. He was, beyond all other men whom I have

met, essentially metropolitan. He loved "the sweet security of streets;" as he says: "I would set up my tabernacle there."

In the spring of 1834, Coleridge's health began to decline. Charles had written to him (in reply) on the 14th April; at which time, his friend had been evidently unwell; for Lamb says that he is glad to see that he could write so long a letter. He was indeed very ill; and no further personal intercourse (I believe) took place between Charles and his old schoolfellow. Coleridge lay ill for months; but his faculties seem to have survived his bodily decay. He died on the 25th July, 1834; yet on the 5th of that month he was able to discourse with his nephew on Dryden and Barrow, on Lord Brook, and Fielding and Richardson, without any apparent diminution of judgment. Even on the 10th (a fortnight only before his death) there was no symptom of speedy dissolution; he then said "the scenes of my early life have stolen into my mind, like breezes blown from the Spice Islands." Charles's sorrow was unceasing. "He was my fifty years' old friend"

(he says) "without a dissension. I cannot think without an ineffectual reference to him." Lamb's frequent exclamations, "Coleridge is dead! Coleridge is dead!" have been already noticed.

And now the figures of other old friends of Charles Lamb, gradually (one by one) slip out of sight. Still in his later letters are to be found glimpses of Wordsworth and Southey, of Rogers and Hood, of Cary (with whom his intimacy increases), especially may be noted Miss Isola, whom he tenderly regarded, and after whose marriage (then left more alone) he retreats to his last retreat, in Church Street, Edmonton.

From details let us escape into a more general narrative. The latest facts need not be painfully enumerated. There is little left, indeed, to particularize. Mary's health fluctuates perhaps more frequently than heretofore. At one time, she is well and happy; at another her mind becomes turbid, and she is then sheltered as usual under her brother's care. The last Essays of Elia are published;—friends visit him;—and he occasionally visits them in London. He dines with Talfourd

and Cary. The sparks which are brought out are as bright as ever, although the splendour is not so frequent. Apparently the bodily strength, never great, but sufficient to move him pleasantly throughout life, seemed to flag a little. Yet he walks as usual. He and his sister "scramble through the Inferno" (as he says to Cary), "Mary's chief pride in it was that she should some day brag of it to you." Then he and Mary became very poorly. He writes:—"We have had a sick child, sleeping, or not sleeping, next to me, with a pasteboard partition between, who killed my sleep. My bedfellows are Cough and Cramp: we sleep three in a bed. Don't come yet, to this house of pest and age." This is in 1833. At the end of that year (in December) he writes (once more humorously) to Rogers, expressing amongst other things his love for that fine artist, Stothard: "I met the dear old man, and it was sublime to see him sit, deaf, and enjoy all that was going on mirthful with the company. He reposed upon the many graceful and many fantastic images he had created." His last letter, written to Mrs. Dyer on

the day after his fall, was an effort to recover a book of Mr. Cary, which had been mislaid or lost, so anxious was he always that every man should have his own.

In December, 1834, the history of Charles Lamb comes suddenly to a close. He had all along had a troubled day: now came the night. His spirits had previously been tolerably cheerful; reading and conversing as heretofore, with his friends, on subjects that were familiar to him. There was little manifest alteration or falling off, in his condition of mind or body. He took his morning walks, as usual. One day he stumbled against a stone, and fell. His face was slightly wounded; but no fatal or (even alarming) consequence was forboded. Erysipelas, however, followed the wound, and his strength (never robust) was not sufficient to enable him to combat successfully that inflammatory and exhausting disease. He suffered no pain (I believe); and when the presence of a clergyman was suggested to him, he made no remark, but understood that his life was in danger; he was quite calm and

collected, quite resigned. At last, his voice began to fail, his perceptions became confused, and he sank gradually—very gradually, until the 27th of December, 1834; and then—he died! It was the fading away or disappearance of life, rather than a violent transit into another world.

He died at Edmonton; not, as has been supposed, at Enfield, to which place he never returned as to a place of residence, after he had once quitted it.

It is not true that he was ever deranged, or subjected to any restraint, shortly before his death. There never was the least symptom of mental disturbance in him, after the time (1795-6) when he was placed for a few weeks in Hoxton Asylum, to allay a little nervous irritation. If it were necessary to confirm this assertion, which is known to me from personal observation and other incontrovertible evidence, I would adduce ten of his published letters (in 1833) and several in 1834; one of them bearing date only four days before his death. All these documents afford ample testimony of his clear good sense and kind

heart: some of them indeed being tinged with his usual humour.

Charles Lamb was fifty-nine years old at his death; of the same age as Cromwell; between whom and himself there was of course no other similitude. A few years before, when he was about to be released from his wearisome toil, at the India House, he said exultingly, that he was passing out of Time into Eternity. But now came the true Eternity; the old Eternity,—without change or limit; in which all men surrender their leisure, as well as their labour; when their sensations and infirmities (sometimes harassing enough) cease and are at rest. No more anxiety for the debtor; no more toil or the worker. The rich man's ambition, the poor man's pains at last are over. *Hic jacet.* That "forlorn" inscription is the universal epitaph. What a world of moral—what speculations—what pathetic wishes, and what terrible dreams—lie enshrouded in that one final issue, which we call—DEATH.

To him who never gave pain to a human being; whose genius yielded nothing but instruc-

tion and delight, was awarded a calm and easy death. No man, it is my belief, was ever loved or lamented more sincerely than Charles Lamb. His sister (his elder by a decade) survived him for the space of thirteen years.

By strict economy, without meanness; with much unpretending hospitality; with frequent gifts and lendings, and without any borrowing; he accumulated, during his thirty-three years of constant labour, the moderate sum of £2000. No more. That was the sum, I believe, which was eventually shared amongst his legatees. His other riches were gathered together and deposited elsewhere; in the memory of those who loved him, and there were many of them: or amongst others of our Anglo-Saxon race, whose minds he has helped to enrich and soften.

The property of Charles Lamb, or so much as might be wanted for the purpose, was by his will directed to be applied towards the maintenance and comfort of his sister; and, subject to this primary object, it was vested in Trustees for the benefit of Miss Isola—Mrs. Moxon.

Mary Lamb's comforts were supplied, with anxiety and tenderness, throughout the thirteen years, during which she survived her brother. I went to see her, after her brother's death; but her frequent illnesses did not render visits at all times welcome or feasible. She then resided in Alpha Road, Saint John's Wood, under the care of an experienced nurse. There was a twilight of consciousness in her, scarcely more, at times; so that perhaps the mercy of God saved her from full knowledge of her great loss. Charles—who had given up all his days for her protection and benefit,—who had fought the great battle of life so nobly,—had left her "for that unknown and silent shore," where, it is hoped, the brother and sister will renew the love which once united them on earth and made their lives holy. Mary Lamb died on the 20th May, 1847; and the brother and sister now lie near each other (in the same grave) in the churchyard of Edmonton, in Middlesex.

POSTSCRIPT.

I have thus told, as far as my ability permits, the story of the life of Charles Lamb.

I have not ventured to deduce any formidable moral from it. Like Lamb himself, I have great dislike to ostentatious precepts and impertinent lessons. Facts themselves should disclose their own virtues. A man who is able to benefit by a lesson, will no doubt discover it, under any husk or disguise, before it is stripped and laid bare —to the kernel.

Besides, too much teaching may disagree with the reader. It is apt to harden the heart; wearying the attention, and mortifying the self-love. Such disturbances of the system interfere with the digestion of a truth.

Even Gulliver is sometimes too manifestly didactic. His adventures simply told, would have emitted spontaneously a luminous atmosphere, and

need not have been distilled into brilliant or pungent drops.

No history is barren of good. Even from the foregoing narrative some benefit may be gleaned, some sympathy may be excited, which naturally forms itself into a lesson.

Let us look at it cursorily.

Charles Lamb was born almost in penury, and he was taught by charity. Even when a boy he was forced to labour for his bread. In the first opening of manhood a terrible calamity fell upon him; in magnitude fit to form the mystery or centre of an antique drama. He had to dwell, all his days, with a person incurably mad. From poverty he passed at once to unpleasant toil and perpetual fear. These were the sole changes in his fortune. Yet, he gained friends, respect, a position; and great sympathy from all; showing what one poor man of genius under grievous misfortune, may do, if he be courageous and faithful to the end.

Charles Lamb never preached nor prescribed; but let his own actions tell their tale and produce

their natural effects; neither did he deal out little apophthegms or scraps of wisdom, derived from other minds. But he succeeded; and in every success there must be a mainstay of right or truth to support it; otherwise it will eventually fail.

It is true that in his essays and numerous letters many of his sincere thoughts and opinions are written down. These, however, are written down simply and just as they occur, without any special design. Some persons exhibit only their ingenuity, or learning. It is not every one who is able, like the licentiate Pedro Garcias, to deposit his wealth of soul by the road-side.

Like all persons of great intellectual sensibility, Lamb responded to all impressions. To sympathise with Tragedy or Comedy only, argues a limited capacity. The mind thus constructed is partially lame or torpid. One hemisphere has never been reached.

It should not be forgotten that Lamb possessed one great advantage. He lived and died amongst *his equals*. This was what enabled him to exercise his natural strength; as neither a parasite nor a

patron can. It is marvellous how freedom of thought operates; what strength it gives to the system; with what lightness and freshness it endues the spirit.—Then, he was made stronger by trouble; made wiser by grief.

I have not attempted to fix the precise spot in which Charles Lamb is to shine hereafter in the firmament of letters. I am not of sufficient magnitude to determine his astral elevation—where he is to dwell—between the sun Shakespeare, and the twinkling Zoilus. That must be left to time. Even the fixed stars at first waver and coruscate, and require long seasons for their consummation and final settlement.

Whenever he differs with us in opinion, (as he does occasionally,) let us not hastily pronounce him to be wrong. It is wise, as well as modest, not to show too much eagerness to adjust the ideas of all other thinkers to the (sometimes low) level of our own.

FINIS.

APPENDIX.

In the following pages will be found the opinions of several distinguished authors, on the subject of Charles Lamb's genius and character, and also a contribution (by myself) to the *Athenæum*, made in January, 1835. All the writers were cotemporary with Lamb, and were personally intimate with him. The extracts may be accepted as corroborative, in some degree, of the opinions set forth in the foregoing Memoir.

[HAZLITT.]

[From Hazlitt's "Spirit of the Age:" title, "Elia."]

Mr. Lamb has the very soul of an antiquarian, as this implies a reflecting humanity. The film of the past hovers for ever before him. He is shy, sensitive, the reverse of everything coarse, vulgar, obtrusive, and commonplace. His spirit clothes itself in the garb of elder time; homelier, but more durable. He is borne along with no pompous paradoxes, shines in no glittering tinsel of a fashionable phraseology; is neither fop nor sophist. He has none of the turbulence or froth of new-fangled opinions. His style runs pure and clear, though it may often

take an underground course, or be conveyed through old-fashioned conduits. . . . There is a fine tone of chiaro-scuro, a moral perspective in his writings. He delights to dwell on that which is fresh to the eye of memory; he yearns after and covets what soothes the frailty of human nature. That touches him most nearly which is withdrawn to a certain distance, which verges on the borders of oblivion :—that piques and provokes his fancy most which is hid from a superficial glance. That which, though gone by, is still remembered, is in his view more genuine, and has given more signs that it will live, than a thing of yesterday, which may be forgotten to-morrow. Death has in this sense the spirit of life in it; and the shadowy has to our author something substantial.

Mr. Lamb has a distaste to new faces, to new books, to new buildings, to new customs. He is shy of all imposing appearances, of all assumptions of self-importance, of all adventitious ornaments, of all mechanical advantages, even to a nervous excess. It is not merely that he does not rely upon, or ordinarily avail himself of them; he holds them in abhorrence : he utterly abjures and discards them. He disdains all the vulgar artifices of authorship, all the cant of criticism and helps of notoriety.

His affections revert to, and settle on the past, but then even this must have something personal and local in it to interest him deeply and thoroughly. He pitches his tent in the suburbs of existing manners; and brings down his account of character to the few straggling remains of the last generation. No one makes the tour of our southern metropolis, or describes the manners of the last age, so well as Mr. Lamb,—with so fine, and yet so formal an air.—How admirably he has sketched the former inmates of the South Sea House; what "fine fretwork he makes of their double and single entries!"

With what a firm yet subtle pencil he has embodied Mrs.

Battle's opinions on Whist! With what well-disguised humour he introduces us to his relations, and how freely he serves up his friends!

The streets of London are his fairy land, teeming with wonder, with life and interest to his retrospective glance, as it did to the eager eye of childhood: he has contrived to weave its tritest traditions into a bright and endless romance.

[From Hazlitt's "Table Talk," Vol. 2.]

Mr. Lamb is the only imitator of old English style I can read with pleasure; and he is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors that the idea of imitation is almost done away. There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject, that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress. The matter is completely his own, though the manner is assumed. Perhaps his ideas are altogether so marked and individual, as to require their point and pungency to be neutralized by the affectation of a singular but traditional form of conveyance. Tricked out in the prevailing costume, they would probably seem more startling and out of the way. The old English authors, Burton, Fuller, Coryate, Sir Thomas Browne, are a kind of mediators between us and the more eccentric and whimsical modern, reconciling us to his peculiarities. I must confess that what I like best of his papers under the signature of Elia, (still I do not presume, amidst such excellence, to decide what is most excellent,) is the account of Mrs. Battle's "Opinions on Whist," which is also the most free from obsolete allusions and turns of expression,—

"A well of native English undefiled."

To those acquainted with his admired prototypes, these Essays of the ingenious and highly gifted author have the same

sort of charm and relish that Erasmus' "Colloquies," or a fine piece of modern Latin, have to the classical scholar.—["On Familiar Style."]

[Hazlitt's "Plain Speaker," Vol. I., Page 62.]

At Lamb's, we used to have lively skirmishes at their Thursday evening parties. I doubt whether the Small Coal-man's musical parties could exceed them. O for the pen of John Buncle to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory! There was Lamb himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine piquant deep eloquent things, in half a dozen sentences, as he does. His jests scald like tears, and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen laughing hairbrained vein of homefelt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we picked out the marrow of authors! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set,—Milton and Shakespeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch Novels had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author of the "Rambler" was only tolerated in Boswell's Life of him: and it was as much as any one could do to edge in a word for Junius. Lamb could not bear *Gil Blas:* this was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph I ever had was in persuading him, after some years difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett. On one occasion he was for making out a list of per-

sons famous in history that one wish to see again, at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus, but we black-balled most of his list! But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious*. He tried them on his palate, as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most,—as in saying the display of the sumptuous banquet, in "Paradise Regained," was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger; and stating that Adam and Eve in "Paradise Lost" were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for Coleridge to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him; nor were his sweets or sours ever diluted with one particle of affectation.—["On the Conversation of Authors."]

[From Autobiography of Leigh Hunt," pp. 250-253.]

Let me take this opportunity of recording my recollections in general of my friend Lamb; of all the world's friend, particularly of his oldest friends, Coleridge and Southey; for I think he never modified or withheld any opinion (in private or bookwards) except in consideration of what he thought they might not like.

Charles Lamb had a head worthy of Aristotle, with as fine a heart as ever beat in human bosom, and limbs very fragile to sustain it. There was a caricature of him sold in the shops, which pretended to be a likeness. Procter went into the shop in a passion, and asked the man what he meant by putting forth such a libel. The man apologized, and said that the artist meant no offence. There never was a true portrait of Lamb. His features were strongly yet delicately cut: he had a fine eye

as well as forehead; and no face carried in it greater marks of thought and feeling. It resembled that of Bacon, with less worldly vigour and more sensibility.

As his frame, so was his genius. It was as fit for thought as could be, and equally as unfit for action; and this rendered him melancholy, apprehensive, humorous, and willing to make the best of everything as it was, both from tenderness of heart and abhorrence of alteration. His understanding was too great to admit an absurdity; his frame was not strong enough to deliver it from a fear. His sensibility to strong contrasts was the foundation of his humour, which was that of a wit at once melancholy and willing to be pleased. . . . His puns were admirable, and often contained as deep things as the wisdom of some who have greater names; such a man, for instance, as Nicole, the Frenchman, who was a baby to him. Lamb would have cracked a score of jokes at Nicole, worth his whole book of sentences; pelted his head with pearls. Nicole would not have understood him, but Rochefoucault would, and Pascal too; and some of our old Englishmen would have understood him still better. He would have been worthy of hearing Shakspeare read one of his scenes to him, hot from the brain. Commonplace found a great comforter in him, as long as it was good-natured; it was to the ill-natured or the dictatorial only that he was startling. Willing to see society go on as it did, because he despaired of seeing it otherwise, but not at all agreeing in his interior with the common notions of crime and punishment, he "*dumbfounded*" a long tirade against vice one evening, by taking the pipe out of his mouth, and asking the speaker, "Whether he meant to say that a thief was not a good man?" To a person abusing Voltaire, and indiscreetly opposing his character to that of Jesus Christ, he said admirably well (though he by no means overrated Voltaire, nor wanted reverence in the other quarter), that "Voltaire was a very good

Jesus Christ *for the French*." He liked to see the church-goers continue to go to church, and wrote a tale in his sister's admirable little book (*Mrs. Leicester's School*) to encourage the rising generation to do so; but to a conscientious deist he had nothing to object; and if an atheist had found every other door shut against him, he would assuredly not have found his. I believe he would have had the world remain precisely as it was, provided it innovated no farther; but this spirit in him was anything but a worldly one, or for his own interest. He hardly contemplated with patience the new buildings in the Regent's Park; and, privately speaking, he had a grudge against *official* heaven-expounders, or clergymen. He would rather, however, have been with a crowd that he disliked, than felt himself alone. He said to me one day, with a face of great solemnity, "What must have been that man's feelings, who thought himself *the first deist?*" . . . He knew how many false conclusions and pretensions are made by men who profess to be guided by facts only, as if facts could not be misconceived, or figments taken for them; and therefore, one day, when somebody was speaking of a person who valued himself on being a matter-of-fact man, "Now," said he, "I value myself on being a matter-of-lie man." This did not hinder his being a man of the greatest veracity, in the ordinary sense of the word; but "truth," he said, "was precious, and not to be wasted on everybody." Those who wish to have a genuine taste of him, and an insight into his modes of life, should read his essays on *Hogarth* and *King Lear*, his *Letters*, his article on the *London Streets*, on *Whist-Playing*, which he loves, and on *Saying Grace before Meat*, which he thinks a strange moment to select for being grateful. He said once to a brother whist-player, whose hand was more clever than clean, and who had enough in him to afford the joke, "M., if dirt were trumps, what hands you would hold!"

[FORSTER.]

From Mr. John Forster's Contribution to the New Monthly Magazine, 1835. Title, "Charles Lamb."

Charles Lamb's first appearance in literature was by the side of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He came into his first battle, as he tells us (literature is a sort of warfare), under cover of that greater Ajax.

We should like to see this remarkable friendship (remarkable in all respects and in all its circumstances) between two of the most original geniuses in an age of no common genius, worthily recorded. It would outvalue, in the view of posterity, many centuries of literary quarrels.

Lamb never fairly recovered the death of Coleridge. He thought of little else (his sister was but another portion of himself) until his own great spirit joined his friend's. He had a habit of venting his melancholy in a sort of mirth. He would, with nothing graver than a pun, "cleanse his bosom of the perilous stuff that weighed" upon it. In a jest, or a few light phrases, he would lay open the recesses of his heart. So in respect of the death of Coleridge. Some old friends of his saw him two or three weeks ago, and remarked the constant turning and reference of his mind. He interrupted himself and them almost every instant with some play of affected wonder or humorous melancholy, on the words "*Coleridge is dead.*" Nothing could divert him from that, for the thought of it never left him. About the same time, we had written to him to request a few lines for the literary album of a gentleman who entertained a fitting admiration of his genius. It was the last request we were to make, and the last kindness we were to receive. He wrote in Mr. ——'s

volume, and wrote of Coleridge. This, we believe, was the last production of his pen. A strange and not unenviable chance, which saw him at the end of his literary pilgrimage, as he had been at the beginning,—in that immortal company. We are indebted, with the reader, to the kindness of our friend for permission to print the whole of what was written. It would be impertinence to offer a remark on it. Once read, its noble and affectionate tenderness will be remembered for ever.

"When I heard of the death of Coleridge, it was without grief. It seemed to me that he long had been on the confines of the next world,—that he had a hunger for eternity. I grieved then that I could not grieve. But since, I feel how great a part he was of me. His great and dear spirit haunts me. I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men or books, without an ineffectual turning and reference to him. He was the proof and touchstone of all my cogitations. He was a Grecian (or in the first form) at Christ's Hospital, where I was deputy Grecian; and the same subordination and deference to him I have preserved through a life-long acquaintance. Great in his writings, he was greatest in his conversation. In him was disproved that old maxim, that we should allow every one his share of talk. He would talk from morn to dewy eve, nor cease till far midnight, yet who ever would interrupt him,—who would obstruct that continuous flow of converse, fetched from Helicon or Zion? He had the tact of making the unintelligible seem plain. Many who read the abstruser parts of his "Friend" would complain that his works did not answer to his spoken wisdom. They were identical. But he had a tone in oral delivery, which seemed to convey sense to those who were otherwise imperfect recipients. He was my fifty years old friend without a dissension. Never saw I his likeness, nor probably the world can see again. I

seem to love the house he died at more passionately than when he lived. I love the faithful Gilmans more than while they exercised their virtues towards him living. What was his mansion is consecrated to me a chapel.

"CHAS. LAMB.

"Edmonton, November 21, 1834."

Within five weeks of this date Charles Lamb died. A slight accident brought on an attack of erysipelas, which proved fatal; his system was not strong enough for resistance. It is some consolation to add, that, during his illness, which lasted four days, he suffered no pain, and that his faculties remained with him to the last. A few words spoken by him the day before he died showed with what quiet collectedness he was prepared to meet death.

As an Essayist, Charles Lamb will be remembered, in years to come, with Rabelais and Montaigne, with Sir Thomas Browne, with Steele, and with Addison. He unites many of the finest characteristics of these several writers. He has wisdom and wit of the highest order, exquisite humour, a genuine and cordial vein of pleasantry, and the most heart-touching pathos. In the largest acceptation of the word he is a humanist. No one of the great family of authors past or present has shown in matters the most important or the most trivial so delicate and extreme a sense of all that is human. It is the prevalence of this characteristic in his writings which has subjected him to occasional charges of want of imagination. This, however, is but half-criticism; for the matter of reproach may in fact be said to be his triumph. It was with a deep relish of Mr. Lamb's faculty that a friend of his once said—"he makes the majesties of imagination seem familiar." It is precisely thus with his own imagination. It eludes the observation of the ordinary reader in the modesty of its truth,

in its social and familiar air. His fancy as an Essayist is distinguished by singular delicacy and tenderness; and even his conceits will generally be found to be, as those of his favourite Fuller often are, steeped in human feeling and passion. The fondness he entertained for Fuller, for the author of the "Anatomy of Melancholy," and for other writers of that class, was a pure matter of temperament. His thoughts were always his own. Even when his words seem cast in the very mould of others, the perfect originality of his thinking is felt and acknowledged—we may add, in its superior wisdom, manliness, and unaffected sweetness. Every sentence in those Essays may be proved to be crammed full of thinking. The two volumes will be multiplied, we have no doubt, in the course of a few years, into as many hundreds; for they contain a stock of matter which must be ever suggestive to more active minds, and will surely revisit the world in new shapes—an everlasting succession and variety of ideas. The past to him was not mere dry antiquity; it involved a most extensive and touching association of feelings and thoughts, reminding him of what we have been and may be, and seeming to afford a surer ground for resting on than the things which are here to-day and may be gone to-morrow. We know of no inquisition more curious, no speculation more lofty, than may be found in the Essays of Charles Lamb. We know no place where conventional absurdities receive so little quarter; where stale evasions are so plainly exposed; where the barriers between names and things are at times so completely flung down. And how indeed could it be otherwise? For it is truth that plays upon his writings like a genial and divine atmosphere. No need for them to prove what they would be at by any formal or logical analysis; no need for him to tell the world that this institution is wrong and that doctrine right; the world may gather from those writings their surest guide

to judgment in these and all other cases—a general and honest appreciation of the humane and true.

Mr. Lamb's personal appearance was remarkable. It quite realized the expectations of those who think that an author and a wit should have a distinct air, a separate costume, a particular cloth, something positive and singular about him. Such unquestionably had Mr. Lamb. Once he rejoiced in snuff-colour, but latterly his costume was inveterately black—with gaiters which seemed longing for something more substantial to close in. His legs were remarkably slight,—so indeed was his whole body, which was of short stature, but surmounted by a head of amazing fineness. His face was deeply marked and full of noble lines—traces of sensibility, imagination, suffering and much thought. His wit was in his eye, luminous, quick, and restless. The smile that played about his mouth was ever cordial and good-humoured; and the most cordial and delightful of its smiles were those with which he accompanied his affectionate talk with his sister, or his jokes against her.

[TALFOURD.]

[From Talfourd's "Memorials of C. Lamb," pp. 337-8, 342-3.]

Except to the few who were acquainted with the tragical occurrences of Lamb's early life, some of his peculiarities seemed strange—to be forgiven, indeed to the excellencies of his nature, and the delicacy of his genius,—but still, in themselves, as much to be wondered at as deplored. The sweetness of his character, breathed through his writings, was felt even by strangers; but its heroic aspect was unguessed, even by many of his friends. Let them now consider it, and ask if the annals of self-sacrifice can show anything in human action and endurance more lovely than its self-devotion exhibits! It was

not merely that he saw through the ensanguined cloud of misfortune which had fallen upon his family, the unstained excellence of his sister, whose madness had caused it; that he was ready to take her to his own home with reverential affection, and cherish her through life; that he gave up, for her sake, all meaner and more selfish love, and all the hopes which youth blends with the passion which disturbs and ennobles it; not even that he did all this cheerfully, and without pluming himself upon his brotherly nobleness as a virtue, or seeking to repay himself (as some uneasy martyrs do) by small instalments of long repining,—but that he carried the spirit of the hour in which he first knew and took his course, to his last. So far from thinking that his sacrifice of youth and love to his sister gave him a licence to follow his own caprice at the expense of her feelings, even in the lightest matters, he always wrote and spoke of her as his wiser self; his generous benefactress, of whose protecting care he was scarcely worthy. How his pen almost grew wanton in her praise, even when she was a prisoner in the Asylum after the fatal attack of lunacy, his letters of the time to Coleridge show; but that might have been a mere temporary exaltation—the attendant fervour of a great exigency and a great resolution. It was not so.

Nervous, tremulous, as he seemed—so light of frame that he looked only fit for the most placid fortune—when the dismal emergencies which chequered his life arose, he acted with as much promitude and vigour as if he had never penned a stanza nor taken a glass too much, or was strung with herculean sinews. None of those tempations, in which misery is the most potent, to hazard a lavish expenditure for an enjoyment to be secured against fate and fortune, ever tempted him to exceed his income, when scantiest, by a shilling. He had always a reserve for poor Mary's periods of seclusion,

and something in hand besides for a friend in need;—and on his retirement from the India House, he had amassed, by annual savings, a sufficient sum (invested, after the prudent and classical taste of Lord Stowell, in "the elegant simplicity of the Three per Cents.") to secure comfort to Miss Lamb, when his pension should cease with him, even if the India Company, his great employers, had not acted nobly by the memory of their inspired clerk—as they did—and gave her the annuity to which a wife would have been entitled—but of which he could not feel assured. Living among literary men, some less distinguished and less discreet than those whom we have mentioned, he was constantly importuned to relieve distresses which an improvident speculation in literature produces, and which the recklessness attendant on the empty vanity of self-exaggerated talent renders desperate and merciless;—and to the importunities of such hopeless petitioners he gave too largely—though he used sometimes to express a painful sense that he was diminishing his own store without conferring any real benefit. "Heaven," he used to say, "does not owe me sixpence for all I have given, or lent (as they call it) to such importunity; I only gave it because I could not bear to refuse it; and I have done good by my weakness."

[B. W. P. "Athenæum," January 24, 1835.]

I was acquainted with Mr. Lamb for about seventeen or eighteen years. I saw him first, (I *think*, for my recollection is here imperfect,) at one of Hazlitt's lectures, or at one of Coleridge's dissertations on Shakspeare, where the metaphysician sucked oranges and said a hundred wonderful things. They were all three extraordinary men. Hazlitt had more of the speculative and philosophical faculty, and more observation (*circum*spection) than Lamb; whilst Coleridge was more subtle and

ingenious than either. Lamb's qualities were—a sincere, generous, and tender nature, wit (at command), humour, fancy, and—if the creation of character be a test of imagination, as I apprehend it is,—imagination also. Some of his phantasms—the people of the South Sea House, Mrs. Battle, the Benchers of the Middle Temple, &c. (all of them ideal), might be grouped into comedies. His sketches are always (to quote his own eulogy on Marvell) full of "a witty delicacy;" and if properly brought out and marshalled, would do honour to the stage.

When I first became acquainted with Mr. Lamb, he lived, I think, in the Temple; but I did not visit him then, and could scarcely, therefore, be said to *know* him, until he took up his residence in Russell-street, Covent-garden. He had a first floor there, over a brazier's shop—since converted into a bookseller's,—wherein he frequently entertained his friends. On certain evenings (Thursdays) one might reckon upon encountering at his rooms from six to a dozen unaffected people, including two or three men of letters. A game at whist and a cold supper, followed by a cheerful glass (glasses!) and "good talk," were the standing dishes upon those occasions. If you came late, you encountered a perfume of the "GREAT PLANT." The pipe, hid in smoke (the violet amongst its leaves),—a squadron of tumblers, fuming with various odours, and a score of quick intelligent glances, saluted you. There you might see Godwin, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Coleridge (though rarely), Mr. Robinson, Serjeant Talfourd, Mr. Ayrton, Mr. Alsager, Mr. Manning,—sometimes Miss Kelly, or Liston,—Admiral Burney, Charles Lloyd, Mr. Alsop, and various others; and if Wordsworth was in town, you might stumble upon him also. Our friend's brother, John Lamb, was occasionally there; and his sister (his excellent sister) invariably presided.

The room in which he lived was plainly and almost carelessly furnished. Let us enter it for a moment. Its ornaments,

you see, are principally several long shelves of ancient books; (those are his "ragged veterans"). Some of Hogarth's prints, two after Leonardo da Vinci and Titian, and a portrait of Pope, enrich the walls. At the table sits an elderly lady (in spectacles) reading; whilst from an old-fashioned chair by the fire springs up a little spare man in black, with a countenance pregnant with expression, deep lines in his forehead, quick luminous restless eyes, and a smile as sweet as ever threw sunshine upon the human face. You see that you are welcome. He speaks: "Well, boys, how are you? What's the news with you? What will you take?" You are comfortable in a moment. Reader! it is Charles Lamb who is before you—the critic, the essayist, the poet, the wit, the large-minded *human* being, whose apprehension could grasp, without effort, the loftiest subject and descend in gentleness upon the humblest; who sympathised with all classes and conditions of men, as readily with the sufferings of the tattered beggar and the poor chimney-sweeper's boy as with the starry contemplations of Hamlet, "the Dane," or the eagle-flighted madness of Lear.

The books that I have adverted to, as filling his shelves, were mainly English books—the poets, dramatists, divines, essayists, &c.,—ranging from the commencement of the Elizabeth period down to the times of Addison and Steele. Besides these, of the earliest writers, Chaucer was there; and, amongst the moderns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and a few others, whom he loved.

He had more real knowledge of old English literature than any man whom I ever knew. He was not an antiquarian. He neither hunted after commas, nor scribbled notes which confounded his text. The *Spirit* of the author descended upon him; and he felt it! With Burton and Fuller, Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne he was an intimate. The ancient poets—chiefly the dramatic poets—were his especial friends. He knew every point and turn of their wit, all the beauty of their cha-

racters; loving each for some one distinguishing particular and despising none. For absolute contempt is a quality of youth and ignorance—a foppery which a wise man rejects, and *he* rejected it accordingly. If he contemned anything, it was contempt itself. He saw that every one bore some sign or mark (God's Gift) for which he ought to be valued by his fellows, and esteemed a man. He could pick out a merit from each author in this turn. He liked Heywood for his simplicity and pathos; Webster for his deep insight into the heart; Ben Jonson for his humour; Marlow for his "mighty line;" Fletcher for his wit and flowing sweetness; and Shakspeare for his combination of wonders. He loved Donne too, and Quarles, and Marvell, and Sir Philip Sidney, and a long list besides.

No one will love the old English writers again as *he* did. Others may have a leaning towards them—a respect—an admiration—a sort of *young* man's love: but the true relishing is over; the close familiar friendship is dissolved. He who went back into dim antiquity, and sought them out, and proclaimed their worth to the world—abandoning the gaudy rhetoric of popular authors for their sake, is now translated into the shadowy regions of the friends he worshipped. He who was once separated from them by a hundred lustres, hath surmounted that great interval of time and space, and is now, in a manner, THEIR CONTEMPORARY!

* * * * *

The wit of Mr. Lamb was known to most persons conversant with existing literature. It was said that his friends bestowed more than due praise upon it. It is clear that his enemies did it injustice. Such as it was, it was at all events *his own*. He did not "get up" his conversations, nor explore the hoards of other wits, nor rake up the ashes of former fires. Right or wrong, he set to work unassisted; and by dint of his own strong capacity and fine apprehension, he struck out as many sub-

stantially new ideas, as any man of his time. The quality of his humour was essentially different from that of other men. It was not simply a tissue of jests or conceits, broad, far-fetched, or elaborate; but it was a combination of humour with pathos—a sweet stream of thought, bubbling and sparkling with witty fancies; such as I do not remember to have elsewhere met with, except in Shakespeare. There is occasionally a mingling of the serious and the comic in 'Don Juan,' and in other writers; but they differ, after all, materially from Lamb in humour:—whether they are better or worse, is unimportant. His delicate and irritable genius, influenced by his early studies, and fettered by old associations, moved within a limited circle. Yet, this was not without its advantages; for, whilst it stopped him from many bold (and many idle) speculations and theories, it gave to his writings their peculiar charm, their individuality, their sincerity, their pure gentle original character. Wit, which is "impersonal," and, for that very reason perhaps, is nine times out of ten a mere heartless matter, in him assumed a new shape and texture. It was no longer simply malicious, but was coloured by a hundred gentle feelings. It bore the rose as well as the thorn. His heart warmed the jests and conceits with which his brain ws busy, and turned them into flowers.

Every one who knew Mr. Lamb, knew that his humour was not affected. It was a style,—a habit; generated by reading and loving the ancient writers, but adopted in perfect sincerity, and used towards all persons and upon all occasions. He was the same in 1810 as in 1834—when he died. A man cannot go on "affecting" for five and twenty years. He must be sometimes sincere. Now, Lamb was always the same. I never knew a man upon whom Time wrought so little.

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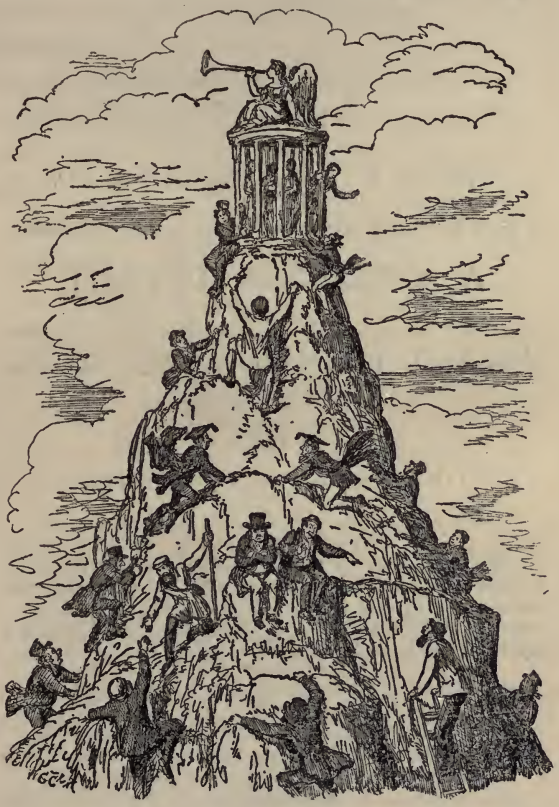

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